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I. Henlong, the Belle of Wakching

THE NAKED NAGAS

by

Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, Ph.D.

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TO
J. P. MILLS

ANNUAL REPORT 1966

PREFACE

IMPARTIALITY is difficult to maintain when writing of friends. Even if these friends belong to a primitive people and your first approach was that of a scientific observer, you find that in sharing their daily life the first studied aloofness gives way before a growing emotional attachment. Later, the memories of joyous experiences overshadow less pleasant impressions, and the tendency to idealize one's far-away friends is inevitable.

I am afraid that there may be some who will ask, as a charming lady once did after one of my lectures: How can you express so much sympathy for savage head-hunters? She thought them horrible—these Nagas, with their promiscuous love affairs and their barbaric habit of cutting off each other's heads.

Yet I have not tried to veil my affection for my Naga friends nor the attraction they hold for me. For this is not a scientific book, and though it is largely concerned with the life of a little-known people it is not overladen with anthropological data. Much of my scientific material is still unpublished, but part of it forms the substance of the following articles, where those interested in Naga culture will find more detailed information:

“The Sacred Founder's Kin among the Eastern Angami Nagas” (a joint paper with J. P. Mills), *Anthropos*, Vol. XXXI, 1936.

“Bericht über eine Expedition zu den Kalyo Kengyu Naga, Assam,” *Anthropos*, Vol. XXXII, 1937.

“Through the Unexplored Mountains of the Assam-Burma Border,” *Geographical Journal*, London, Vol. XCI, March 1938.

“Die Hochgottgestalten der Ao und Konyak Naga von Assam,” *Mitteilungsblatt der Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde*, No. 8, 1938.

“The Morung System of the Konyak Nagas, Assam,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. LXVIII, 1938.

“The Megalithic Culture of the Naga Tribes of Assam,” *Research and Progress*, Vol. V, No. 2, 1939.

In the following pages I have only described my life among the Nagas, and though I feel no remorse in omitting the more technical anthropological problems, I do feel very apologetic for the shortcomings of my English. The result of writing a book in a foreign language is generally awkward, but to deliver oneself into the hands of a translator is usually worse, and in this particular case my English will perhaps convey a truer picture of the “dogs-and-cats” Assamese in which I talked to the Nagas than would the style of a polished but impersonal translation.

I could have accomplished little of my work in Assam without the extensive help I received from the British authorities during my stay in India. My special thanks are due to the Marquess of Linlithgow, Viceroy of India; to the late Sir Michael Keane, Governor of Assam; to his successor, Sir Robert Reid; to Mr. J. G. Laithwaite, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, and Lt.-Col. Stable; to Lt.-Col. R. Wright; and to Professor J. H. Hutton, the famous expert on the Naga Hills, who gave me a great deal of information on certain problems of Naga culture.

I am most indebted, however, to Mr. J. P. Mills, until 1937 Deputy-Commissioner of the Naga Hills, to whom this book is dedicated as a token of my sincere and lasting gratitude.

It would be scarcely fair if I did not include in these acknowledgements my thanks to all the Nagas, whose friendship and understanding alone made my work possible. These thanks would probably never reach them if I did not happen to be on the eve of a new journey that I hope will lead me once more to their villages.

C. v. F. H.

April, 1939

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THE NAKED NAGAS

INTRODUCTION

AN icy wind sweeps over the hills, forcing the coolies to crowd closer and yet closer round the camp-fires. Wrapped only in thin cotton cloths, they seem curiously content with this one-sided warmth, while we shiver even inside our bamboo hut, that offers at least a scant protection against the intense cold of the November night. The maps, drawn up by the Survey Party of 1924, lie spread out on the improvised table. So far they have served us well, but now we have come to the edge of mapped territory; before us lies unexplored country. Great white patches, standing out from the green and brown, indicate its extent, and a line boldly drawn through land where no European has yet been marks the probable frontier between Assam and Burma.

We sit round the hurricane-lamp waiting, full of impatience for the return of the men sent out to reconnoitre the route for to-morrow's march; in the country ahead we shall be entirely dependent on their advice. At last three figures appear in the low doorway. They are the chief Chingmak and two of his sons. They throw back their cloths, embroidered with red-dog's hair, in welcome, showing the tattoo of successful head-hunters—blue against their brown skins. Our interpreter slips in behind them, and soon all four squat on the ground before us.

‘As long as the path lies on my land’, Chingmak assures us, warming himself with a sip of rum, ‘we have cleared it; but we ran into men from Noklak on the frontier. They shouted abuse and warned us against going farther. It seems that they are determined not to let you pass through their land.’

‘If there is no other way than the path over Noklak, then we shall have to force our way through,’ observed Major Williams, the military commander of the expedition. ‘We must get through whether Noklak likes it or not.’

‘I don’t think that will be necessary. Noklak won’t put up any serious resistance. They are probably only afraid that Pangsha will blame them for letting us through too easily.’ With twenty years’ experience among the Nagas, Mills is sure that it is a far cry from a boasting threat to a real fight. ‘But an enemy at our backs while we march against Pangsha would be awkward. Let us hope we can come to terms with Noklak.’

Passionately I share this wish! Noklak is the first of the villages of the mythical Kalyo Kengyu Nagas, and it is only by a friendly visit that I can learn anything of their culture.

‘Noklak is not marked on the map, but Chingmak thinks we can reach it in one day’s march. Now there is still the question, exactly where is Pangsha? Not one of Chingmak’s people has ever been there. I suppose we shall have to cross the Langnyu river.’

Once more Mills bends over the maps, which seem to provide more riddles than they solve.

* * * * *

It is just a year ago that I bent over these same maps on one of the large tables of the Royal Geographical Society in London. It was a dark November day, and the buses in Kensington Gore ploughed their way through a thick fog, which penetrated even the closed windows of the Library and hovered in faint halos round the lamp. The prospect of spending twelve months among one of the little-known Naga Tribes in the mountain of Assam had led me to study these large-scale maps of the north-east corner of India. Dreams of tropical heat and of blue skies forced me to forget the yellow London fog, and my excitement grew as I looked at the maps, realizing that, after years of anthropological work on the green table, I should so soon be among real ‘savages’.

It is still an open question for the philologists why the Nagas are called Nagas. Some derive the name from the Sanskrit word ‘Hillmen’, others from a word meaning ‘naked people’. But however this may be, let it suffice here that the Nagas not only live in the mountains, but cover their magnificently formed bodies as little as any sculptor could

wish. How unfortunate it is that no artist has ever been stranded in their hills; even to-day the camera and the pen are their only portayers.

The land of the Nagas is one of the least accessible parts of British India. For those geographically interested be it said that it extends between the Brahmaputra plains and the valley of the Chindwin, reaching as far as the Hukong River in the north and the valley of Manipur in the south. Most of the ridges lie under 6000 feet, but the main range of the Patkoi, forming the frontier between Assam and Burma, rises to heights of 12,000 feet.

For thousands of years the Naga tribes have lived in these hills, as on some happy island, almost untouched by the waves of civilization which from time to time have surged through the plains of Assam and the valleys of Upper Burma. The Nagas have never heard of Hindu deities or of the teachings of Buddha.

Ancient cultures, which were once spread over great parts of South-eastern Asia, and which in most countries had finally to give way before the higher Indian and Chinese civilizations, have been preserved here in a comparatively untouched form, and allow us to observe with our own eyes early types of human culture.

It is fortunate indeed that the possibilities the Naga Tribes offer to the science of man have not remained unexploited. Since the middle of the last century the English have gradually extended their administration to the parts of the Naga Hills bordering on the Brahmaputra valley, and among the governing officials have been men who, interesting themselves in the tribes entrusted to their care far beyond the requirements of administration, have embarked on systematic anthropological research. In 1911 T. C. Hodson wrote a book on the Naga Tribes of Manipur; ten years later Professor J. H. Hutton followed with detailed monographs on two individual tribes, the Angami and the Sema Nagas; and J. P. Mills, who is still working in Assam, continued the series with his books on the Lhota, Ao, and Rengma Nagas. But beyond the territory under British administration there live tribes of whom little is known but

their name, and even within British territory anthropologists still find many latent opportunities. It was just such opportunities that the large tribe of the Konyak Nagas seemed to present, for although a small section came under British administration about twenty-five years ago, the majority still live their old free life, cutting off each other's heads in as neighbourly a fashion as ever.

Involuntarily my eyes always reverted to the white patches on the map, and their fascination grew with the thought of those tribes who, unseen by any white man, lived there in the seclusion of their mountain world. It would certainly be difficult to reach them. Until recently all Nagas were inveterate head-hunters, and even now, outside British rule, head-hunters they remain. The unwary traveller with the most peaceful of intentions would undoubtedly lose his head to the 'ruling passion' of the Nagas.

I was not surprised, therefore, when I finally received the official permission to work in the administered part of the Naga Hills, to read that I would under no circumstances be permitted to cross the boundaries of British territory. All my hopes of ever penetrating into the unexplored country east of the administered territory disappeared for the time being. Yet I was not entirely discouraged; once in sight of the promised land, who could foretell what unexpected chance might help me? I was pleased to have at least permission to work in the administered area, which is generally closed to all travellers.

By a stroke of luck I caught Mr. Mills, then Deputy-Commissioner of the Naga Hills, in London before he left for Assam. Nothing could be more encouraging than his enthusiasm for the Nagas and the kindness with which he helped me with my plans. The future alone would show the inestimable value of Mills' help.

At last, in May 1936, all my preparations complete, I watched the deserts of Africa and Arabia from the white decks of the *Victoria*, as she slipped slowly between the banks of the Suez Canal. A pale sun, high in a leaden sky, and the damp, depressing heat paralysed all vitality. Even Perin, the young Parsee girl returning to Bombay after a

winter in the Alps, lay silent and exhausted in her deck-chair; Perin, who wore her clothes from Paris with so much chic and hated the idea of returning to India. Idly I turned the pages of Rupert Brooke's *Poems*; there is no better reading on a sea voyage than poems, for one never comes to an end with them, and thus the precious standing still of time remains unspoilt. The natural communicativeness of the Austrian, one of our greatest faults and perhaps my own greatest weakness, led me to read aloud to Perin—one of the love-poems.

'Do go on reading! How lovely it is to hear a poem! So much more lovely than to read it oneself.'

There was silence when I had finished. Perin gazed into the distance of the desert. After a little while she remarked with a sigh:—

'I think that that is the first time a poem was ever read to me. None of my boy friends would ever think of such a thing. You have no idea how unromantic the Indian men are. To read a poem to a woman would seem to them the height of absurdity.'

My naive ideas of romantic fairy-tale India trembled. How sad it seemed that there should be women to whom no man ever read a poem! Sadder, perhaps, even than the thought of the girl to whom no man ever gave flowers.

A few days in the grilling heat of India and I had forgotten such considerations. A world so entirely different from the home of European sentiment must necessarily cherish quite other relations between men and women. Yet who, standing, as I stood a week later, enraptured before the Taj Mahal—that most exquisite of memorials ever erected to a beloved woman—can consider romantic love foreign to the people of India?

1

THE NAGA HILLS

FEW of the Europeans whom I met in India had ever heard of the Nagas; most of them considered me more or less crazy for wanting to spend a whole year among such 'savages'. A learned Brahmin in Benares, when I told him of my plans to work among the Nagas, thought that I wanted to study people whose nakedness had religious grounds. There were, indeed, many such completely naked men in Delhi and Benares, sitting cross-legged on the streets, hardly noticed among the other ascetics and beggars. But the suggestion of my Brahmin friend, although rather wide of the mark, strengthened my opinion that perhaps the name 'Naga' refers in some way to the nakedness of its bearers.

I stayed a few days with Lord Linlithgow in Simla and he was the first to tell me of the Nagas from his own personal experience. Before going out to India as Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow had visited the Naga Hills on an agricultural commission. To him I owe the recipe for a special Naga delicacy. I don't know whether he ever tasted it; I can only regret that I never did. Take a young dog, dose him properly with castor oil. When this has taken effect, feed him with as much rice as he can swallow. Kill him, truss him, and boil him together with the rice. This is the simplest and best way of preparing stuffed dog.

I left Viceregal Lodge enriched, not only in my knowledge of Naga cuisine, but also in the possession of numerous letters of introduction; the most vital part of every travellers' equipment in the East. The English in India offer an overwhelming hospitality, and the introduction of a common friend is everywhere an assurance of a hearty welcome, and even of invitations to stay for several days.

Calcutta is certainly not counted among the beautiful towns of India, and in the few days of my stay there I could find little to recommend it but the air-conditioned dining-

room and the excellent food of the Great Eastern Hotel. Somewhat sceptically I received the assurances of some of my friends that within half a year, dying of boredom among the Nagas, I would seek distraction in the Christmas season of Calcutta.

I was thoroughly glad when at last I sat in the train rolling in a north-eastern direction through Bengal. After the dry, parched desert landscape of Rajputana and the United Provinces, the luscious green of the rice-fields was a real and sensuous relief. Occasionally among the groups of palms and banana trees there were clusters of untidy houses and naked brown children, watching the water-buffaloes lazily wallowing in the mud. After a night and a day in the train, I crossed the Brahmaputra by ferry at Gauhati and slept in yet another train. Next morning the landscape had entirely changed. Dense jungle, dripping with last night's rain, hedged in both sides of the railway, running through the wide plains of Assam nearly as far as the North-East Frontier of India. My destination, the station of Manipur Road, where the road leads through the Naga Hills to Manipur, could not be far off.

Would Mills, knowing of my coming, have arranged for some sort of conveyance to bring me to Kohima? Without my bearer and without a useful knowledge of any Indian language I felt strange and rather uncertain. In Calcutta I had sent my bearer back to Bombay, and I deeply mistrusted the little Assamese I had learnt from a Bengali student in London. That I could converse over the purchase of chickens, eggs, and bananas, and that I was fully conversant with the ways of addressing superiors, equals, and inferiors, seemed to me of little use in negotiating the transport of the sixteen pieces of my luggage.

Jumping from the train as it drew into the small station, I sought eagerly for some sort of assistance. A European alighting at Manipur Road is not an every-day occurrence, and my feet had hardly touched the ground when a small policeman in an immaculate brown uniform ran up to me. Saluting, he handed me a letter, and to my utter relief, promised in quite understandable English to look after my

luggage. Instead of some dangerous weapon, he only carried a small baton tucked under his arm—a reassuring sign of the peaceful character of the country! At first I was astounded by the Mongolian, almost Chinese, type of this man. Later I discovered that he, like all the other Gurkhas forming the majority of the Assam police, came from Nepal. The letter was from Mills, who apologized for not coming to meet me, but told me that a lorry would bring me and my luggage that very same morning to Kohima. Enclosed with this letter was a pass, indispensable for entering the Naga Hills District.

After a wonderful breakfast in the Dak Bungalow—that very ingenious institution which alone makes travelling possible in those remote parts—my luggage was loaded on to the lorry and I found myself sitting next to the driver, a Manipuri. In the back three other passengers sat on my luggage.

It is a narrow but very good road which leads for the next few miles through a friendly meadowland with patches of light wood and the straw-roofed houses of Assamese peasants. The sky was cloudy and the air cool. Had I been able to overlook the palms and the banana bushes, I might have been in some Alpine valley, for the fresh green grass and the grazing cattle appeared very homely. It was not long before we came to the road barrier, where all travellers must show their passes. Here runs the frontier dividing the Assam plains from the country of the Naga Tribes, which no stranger, whether European or Indian, can enter without special permission. Were it not for this regulation, the Assamese and the traders from other parts of India would gradually filter through into the Naga country and mercilessly fleece the now-pacified Nagas.

The road following a swiftly-flowing river, swollen now during the rains, winds through a wooden valley, and then climbs, zigzagging up the mountain in sickening hairpin bends. The gradient is considerable, for the forty-six miles from the station to Kohima bring you to a height of almost 4800 feet. Dense tropical forests shut in the road with garlands and curtains of creepers hanging from the high trees.

A group of road-workers appeared in front of us. Surely they were Angami Nagas—the first Nagas I had seen? The friendly smile with which they greeted us told me that they were not Indians of the plains. Their appearance, too, was unmistakable. Black loin-cloths embroidered with cowrie-shells only scantily covered the brown bodies of the workmen, their legs were ornamented with cane rings, and hardly a man lacked a necklace of multi-coloured stone beads. Bundles of white and black cotton-wool were stuffed into their pierced ears. My first impression of the people among whom I was to live was definitely pleasant. If even here, on the only metalled road of the district, the Nagas retained the individuality of their costume, could I not hope to find quite unspoilt conditions farther in the interior?

The tropical forest receded as we gained height, and the trees became more European in character, when we came to the region where the Angami Nagas grow their rice on irrigated terrace-fields. During the rains the road is continually ruined by landslides, and at one spot numerous Nagas were busy clearing it.

About 4800 feet above sea-level, the houses of Kohima, the seat of the Deputy-Commissioner and the Administrative centre of the Naga Hills, lie scattered over the saddle of the mountain. There are not many of these low, red-roofed bungalows, for the number of Europeans seldom exceeds more than six, and only as many Indian merchants are permitted to stay in the one street bazaar as are necessary to furnish the needs of the few Indian clerks and the small garrison of Assam Rifles.

The lorry stopped before the door of a sloping garden, where deep-violet bougainvillas blossomed and shining red flowers stood out on the thin branches of the hibiscus shrubs. It was the garden of the Deputy-Commissioner, and next moment I saw Mills coming down the steep path from his bungalow.

‘I’m sorry I couldn’t come to meet you. I should have liked to show you the country myself, but I had too much to do here.’

Small wonder that here a man should have too much to do,

who, with the help of a single white official and several clerks, administers a district of about 4293 square miles, and a population of more than 178,000. Later I discovered that Mills was personally accessible to each one of these 178,000 Nagas, and even quite trivial cases often came up before his court for settlement.

‘The day after to-morrow I am going on a tour through the land of the Eastern Angamis. Would you like to come with me? We shall be away about a fortnight.’

I accepted this proposal with great enthusiasm; I could wish for no better initiation than a tour with Mills.

All sorts of preparations had to be made. I fetched what I thought I should need on tour out of my cases, and packed it into the high carrying-baskets which Mills lent me. Nagas will only carry in such baskets—or joppas as they are called—and those wishing to travel in these Hills must own a great number. I had, then, to engage a boy. This appeared to be no easy matter, for the number of boys who have been in the service of Europeans is small. However, Mills knew what to do, and a few hours later, as we sat at tea in his bungalow, the boy in question arrived. He was a Lhota Naga, and was called Tsampio. Establishing my authority at once and in the right way, Mills explained to him that though the new Sahib had not yet given any Feast of Merits himself, his father had given one in his name and had slaughtered many buffaloes. The giving of a feast is a matter of social prestige for the Nagas, and Tsampio was apparently well pleased to enter the service of a Sahib from such a good family. Tsampio took his work very seriously, and it was seldom—much too seldom—that a smile passed over his face. At first I attributed this to the difficulty of understanding; but though this difficulty gradually disappeared, his temperament did not clear up. He chose to wear, like most of the Nagas who come in touch with the Mission, shorts and a khaki shirt, but on tour he adorned his head with a thick wine-red wool cap. Even in the worst heat of the midday sun he pulled this deep down over his ears.

We started from Kohima in sunny weather, which was a piece of luck during the rains. Mills had arranged for

ponies for himself and for me, so that we could ride whenever we were tired. Otherwise we preferred to walk, talking to one or other of the Angamis who accompanied us. The most comic figure in our company was Thevoni, an Angami with a merry full-moon face and a round belly, bloated with too-frequent bouts of rice-beer. As a sign of his office as Government interpreter, he wore a waistcoat of bright red over his black loin-cloth. Thevoni was an irrepressible talker, and only too eager to tell us of all the customs and beliefs of his tribe. His stay in Kohima, where he had interpreted the complaints of his own people at the courts of the Deputy-Commissioner, even helping in the decision of some of the quarrels, had in no way shaken his belief in the goodness of the old customs. Mills valued him highly, for it is men such as Thevoni who can defer the decline of the old Naga culture for a long time to come through their prestige in their own villages.

The well-kept bridle-path led along an open slope. Immeasurable mountain country extended before our eyes; mighty wooded ridges succeeded one another, grouping themselves into high ranges and long chains till they finally blended with the sky and the clouds in the haze of the blue distance. On many of the slopes there are clearings and terrace-fields, but the greater part of the mountains is covered with forest and secondary jungle. The Nagas do not live in the valleys; their settlements are situated on the central ridges between 2000 and 6000 feet above sea-level.

After several hours' march, we climbed down into the valley and crossed a small river. On the opposite bank there were several women waiting for us. The prettiest among them was Thevoni's young wife, who had come one day's march to meet him. The women had brought huge gourds full of rice-beer in their carrying-baskets, to refresh us, and though the beer did not have a very inspiring look, it tasted definitely good. But one can always have too much of a good thing: we had to taste the beer of each of the women in turn. Without rice-beer, the life of the Angami is little more than an evil dream. He drinks water as seldom

as he can. 'Only when we go hunting do we sometimes drink water,' Thevoni remarked: 'then it is difficult to carry rice-beer with us. But when we go fishing, the women bring us rice-beer down to the river.'

Lest our ponies should have been brought entirely in vain, we rode up the mountain to the Chakhabama rest-house. It was one of those two-roomed inspection bungalows which are distributed all over the District at distances of eight to twelve miles along the most important bridle-paths. Our boys had gone ahead and had already prepared a meal for us. I found travelling in the Naga Hills much more comfortable than I had imagined.

Chakhabama consists nowadays only of a few small houses near the bungalow. But here there was great excitement. The keeper of the bungalow, an Angami from Kohima, had died that morning of dysentery after only a day's fever. His relations arrived one after the other, and a grave had already been dug on the slope near the path. Was it an evil omen that a funeral should be the first Naga ceremony I was to witness?

Loud wailing and crying came from the house of the dead, and the shrill, long-drawn-out screams of the widow filled the air and mingled with the dreary lamentations of the other relations. Some men cut up the flesh of a cow, while from time to time others fired off shots from old muzzle-loaders to scare away the evil spirits. Then a good friend of the dead man, with tears streaming down his face, ran out of the house; he jumped madly in the air, screaming challenges to the spirits who had caused the death, to come and fight. Finally the corpse was carried out wrapped in a coloured cloth. The widow, a slim young woman, wailed loudly and, beating the ground with a cloth, cursed it. Her hair was dishevelled and the cloth slipping from her shoulder left her breasts free. The other mourners, covered with grey and white cloths, moved in slow procession towards the grave. After the burial followed the distribution of the meat; tempers cooled down, and even the widow tidied her hair and quietly accepted her share. Again and again the mourners put the gourds of rice-beer to their lips; but as

soon as they had all received their shares of meat, they returned to their villages.

The next day, arriving at one of those small rest-houses in the middle of the woods that the Nagas like to erect on their paths, we were greeted by a large and noisy crowd. Thenizumi, Thevoni's home village, lay a few miles off the path, and about thirty people had come to welcome Mills. They explained that since one of the dignitaries of the village had died the evening before, the village held a 'genna', and none of the inhabitants might work on the fields. Apparently this tour brought the people little luck. The village headmen or gaonburas, wrapped in the insignia of their office—the red cloths of the Government—came forward to welcome Mills. This is a wisely chosen 'uniform', for it blends admirably with the native culture, responding to the Naga's preference for coloured cloths. The women wore the large brass ear-rings peculiar to the Eastern Angami Nagas, which are so heavy that the weight must be borne by a band run over the straight black hair. Their broad, definitely mongoloid faces are not exactly pretty, but with their friendly and cheerful expressions and deep blue cloths the women are often very picturesque. Thevoni's divorced wife was among those who welcomed us with rice-beer. How much more reasonably she behaved than many women of more civilized lands. She showed no kind of embarrassment in front of Thevoni and his new wife.

We arrived at the bungalow, lying slightly below the village of Cheswezumi, at the head of this strange procession. After a short rest, and while Mills listened to reports on several cases, I climbed up alone to the village. I wanted my first impression of a Naga village undisturbed. Only a beginner is so sentimental, but even to-day that first moment is unforgettable: when the Naga culture, so familiar from books and ethnographical museums, appeared as a living entity.

The slippery path led through a narrow rocky passage, overgrown with bushes and prickly creepers. The defence of such a tunnel must be easy, for there is only enough room for men to pass in single file. Emerging, I found myself on

a large open space. On two sides stood houses, with façades of broad, upright planks decorated with conventionalized carvings; I recognized the representations of cattle, pigs' heads, women's breasts, dance ornaments, and human heads, those symbols of successful head-hunting which for the Angami now belong to the past; perhaps these houses were still of the 'good old times'. Crossed barge-boards rose from the gables of one of the houses, like the enormous antlers of some proud stag. Proud, too, must be the owner of these wooden horns, for they show that he has given several of those expensive feasts of merit whereby the Naga rises in social prestige and in the esteem of his neighbours.

An old man sat in front of one of the houses mending a basket; without stopping his work he gave me a friendly smile. Nor did my appearance upset an old woman, spreading out rice to dry. A dog began to bark, and she chased it away. I went on down the broad street between the houses. The village seemed rather deserted; apparently most of the inhabitants were out in the fields. Only several small boys sat on a high stone platform in the middle of the village. No sooner had they noticed me than the village seemed to wake up. In a few minutes they collected in a little group and began to follow me at a respectful distance. Eventually an old man in the red cloth of a gaonbura appeared and invited me with signs and gestures to come into his house. It was so dark inside that at first I could see absolutely nothing; Naga houses have no windows, and it takes some time to get used to the blackness, before the rows of huge store-baskets and various pieces of household furniture take shape. I sat down on a long bench, carved from a single piece of wood and furnished with holes for pounding the rice. My host cleaned a small gourd, in which he offered me rice-beer. Our conversation was definitely limited; we smiled at each other and murmured some words, which, however, remained equally unintelligible to us both. The beer was good, and, according to custom, I accepted another gourd-ful. But I was not through with this one round. I had hardly taken leave of my old man, with many gestures of thanks, when a neighbour of my host

pulled me into his house; there the whole ceremony was repeated.

Can these really be the same Angamis in whose villages, not so very long ago, certain death would have been the fate of any unprotected stranger? How overjoyed they seemed, these people who had never seen me before, entertaining me with rice-beer in their houses! Forgotten were the glorious head-hunting raids, though the carvings of enemy heads on the walls of the houses still bore testimony to their success. In Europe centuries of so-called civilization have not achieved so much; the Nagas have relinquished, not easily perhaps, but still relinquished, much sooner than we, the pleasures and the pains of war.

On returning to the bungalow, the villagers brought me a cock as a present. It is a Naga custom to honour distinguished visitors with gifts of chickens; on some of my tours I collected more than I could eat and ended by travelling with chickens in small coups tied to the carrying baskets.

During the next few days Mills was mainly occupied in counting the houses of several villages for the assessment of the taxes. The Angamis pay an annual house-tax of three rupees; old and sick people are granted exemption. It often happens that two families live in one house, and in such cases the house is taxed on the number of its hearths, for every family must own its own hearth. But the Naga, like everyone else, hates paying taxes; it is a favourite trick of theirs to cover one of the two fire-places during the visit of the Deputy-Commissioner, pretending that only one family lives in the house.

Whenever we arrived in a village the inhabitants held a holiday. It is difficult to say whether it was from joy at our visit or whether, according to the old Naga belief, it was for a 'genna', when the abstention from work averts the evil consequences of any such unusual event as an earthquake or the violent death of a member of the community. Crowds of men and boys followed Mills from house to house, and the women peeped shyly and curiously out of their doors. It is not an easy job to count the two or three hundred houses of a

large village and at the same time to check all the statements of the gaonburas as to poverty and inability to pay, on the part of the individual villagers. Even the purely physical exertion is considerable, and an official without a mountaineer's training would be lost in a Naga settlement. Since most of the villages climb steplike up the mountain slopes, scarcely three houses stand on the same level, and strolling through the village you have incessantly to scramble up and down stone steps and slippery paths. In front of a house there is often a drop of more than thirty feet to a neighbours' roof. Tall posts propped up against the edge of the steps carry the platforms that serve the Naga as lookouts. Like rows of swallows, the young men often perch on these airy scaffolds, each clutching his tall bamboo mug filled with the inevitable rice-beer. High above the yellow roofs and the fantastic gable carvings of the houses and the bamboos that tremble in the slightest breeze, you have a magnificent view over the country, over the bright green of the forest belts and the shining gold of the rice-fields, which, if the spirits are propitious, will fill the great storing-baskets in the autumn, guaranteeing a care-free life for the whole village, and unlimited quantities of rice-beer until the next harvest.

But there still remained many months before the reaping; now, in June, the rice had to be transplanted, and a great deal of hard work was to come. The Angami is expert in constructing terraced fields and irrigation systems. For thousands of feet the mountain slopes are divided into terraces, many as wide as fifteen or twenty feet, others merely narrow strips. Reinforced by walls of pebbles and plastered with mud, these terraces are well able to withstand the torrential rains of Assam. Every rivulet on the mountain side is captured, and the water led through long channels to flood the terraces, for during the whole of its cultivation the rice must be kept under water. The water flows down from one terrace to the one below, and a complicated system of water-rights governs the distribution of the precious liquid; the share in a spring can be bought in exactly the same way as a field. Nocturnal theft of water, by illegitimate tapping of the channels, often causes quarrels that

ultimately come before the Deputy-Commissioner's court in Kohima. The maintenance of the terraces is an endless work, for each one must be levelled with the greatest care, so that the water may lie at a uniform depth; water that is not needed for one terrace is conveyed through channels to the next, but across the face of the rocks, or wherever the ground is uneven, it is carried in aqueducts of bamboo.

One day we climbed up to the village and as we made our way through the labyrinth of terraces, the rhythmic working-songs of the groups of boys and girls fell upon our ears. They stood in rows, ankle-deep in water, planting out the rice seedlings in the soft, flooded ground while one of the lads walked ahead, throwing down the green bundles of seedlings at short intervals. The sun blazed on bent brown backs and the water reflected a thousand dazzling rays. Many hours later, returning on the same path, we found the people still standing ankle-deep in water and still singing the same rhythmic song. They had probably rested at noon in the field-house and quenched their thirst with quantities of foaming rice-beer, and then they had taken up their work once more.

We spent that evening nearly 6000 feet above sea-level, at the Sathazumi inspection bungalow. The sunlight lay golden on the dark wooded ridges, and white fluffy clouds whipped by a stiff breeze, lapped against the steep slopes of the mountains; the valleys were wrapped in deep violet.

But we were not to be allowed to give ourselves up to the peaceful atmosphere of this beautiful evening. Scarcely had we arrived in the bungalow when a tremendous noise arose. There were several cases to be brought before Mills, and the quarrelling parties had each brought hordes of clansmen and friends to support them. This support the clansmen and the friends thought best to render in loud altercations and expressions of opinion. The cork was out of the bottle, and all the anger that had been suppressed for months seemed to explode at the long expected visit of the 'Great Sahib'. Thevoni and another interpreter, acting as 'examining magistrates', had had the cases explained to them beforehand; but it was as much as they could do to

keep the quarrelling parties in hand and to calm their shouts and those of their followers. Most of the quarrels were about fields or inheritances, or the claims of a betrayed husband, suing the seducer of his wife, or the damage that one man's cattle had done to another man's crops. Very patiently Mills worked through the tangle of accusations and defence, and finally passed judgement. But even then the excited harangues still continued outside the bungalow, and every moment I expected the different sides would come to blows.

How is it that the Angamis, who cling so tenaciously to their old customs, seem to be incapable of settling even the smallest quarrel among themselves, running with every bagatelle to the Deputy-Commissioner? Perhaps it is because no individual ever commanded the obedience of the community; for chiefs never ruled in Angami villages. Moreover, the villages are divided into 'khels', local units which in the old times often settled disputes by bloody fights. Even to-day the walls of the khels, separating one section of the villagers from their 'dear' neighbours, are still to be seen. But is there not a single bond uniting the inhabitants of an Angami village? After long and careful investigations we discovered that there does exist one institution which links the whole village together. But to understand it you must go back to the time when the Angamis invaded the country, took possession of the land, and founded their villages. The formal founder of a village was always a man of note, whose wealth and prowess in war revealed his 'virtue'. It was his duty to perform the sacred rites necessary for the prosperity of the village and its protection against supernatural dangers. The office of the founder was inherited by his descendants; even to-day the Tevo, a direct descendant of the village founder, is the mediator between the community as a whole and the supernatural world, the personification of the village in its relations to the magical forces pervading Nature and human life, and, more concretely, the vessel of the 'virtue' of the village.

The privileges of a Tevo are neither numerous nor important. He works in his fields as any ordinary villager

and in the council his voice has no more weight than that of any other man of equal wealth and moral influence. His office, in fact, is in no way an enviable one. It is true that he receives special shares of all animals sacrificed in the village, but many burdensome obligations more than outweigh this privilege. During the first three and a half years of his office he may not visit any other village, and even later on he may never partake of a meal in a strange village, but must always carry his food with him. Still more irksome is the regulation that forbids him to indulge in marital intercourse during those first years. Perhaps you might be led to think that the man envisaged as the successor of the Tevo would cut but a poor figure on the marriage market. Nevertheless there are always girls to be found who are willing to marry a Tevo, though a Tevo's wife may not seek consolation with any other men, and even in the case of divorce, must refrain from all love-making until the end of the period under taboo. Should the wife of a Tevo break this law, she is threatened with exile, for she is thought to be so closely linked with the Tevo, and therefore with the well-being of the whole village, that she must observe the same taboos as the Tevo himself. That the breaking of the taboo may have been accidental or involuntary makes no difference, and Thevoni told us that such a case had occurred in his village not so long ago. A woman from a neighbouring village came to see the Tevo's wife, and during a friendly chat obliged her by picking a few lice out of her hair. Later it became known that the treacherous friend had abstracted one hair from the head of the Tevo's wife and taken it back to her own village. The Tevo and his wife were immediately deprived of their dignity and exiled, for a part of one of them, and therefore a part of the 'virtue' of the whole community, had been carried off to a foreign village.

No wonder that with such beliefs it is not easy to hold the office of Tevo. Yet it has one material advantage; for an understanding administration, recognizing the value of the traditions of Naga culture, exempts the Tevo from paying a house-tax. For would not the realization of a tax



2. Newly Married Woman of the Western Angami Nagas growing her hair



decrease the wealth of the Tevo, and thus lessen the 'virtue' of the whole community?

A strange peculiarity of the Eastern Angamis is their marriage customs. On passing through their villages one soon notices that the youngest—and naturally therefore the prettiest—girls, wear their hair quite closely cropped. This is a sign that they are virgins, or at least are taken for such. But custom or no custom, the Naga girl soon grows weary of her premarital state, her short hair, and her virginity. And since the *grande passion* is not at the beck and call of youth, she is inclined to dispense with the burdens of maidenhood by entering into one of those trial marriages which seldom last long and are usually dissolved in the most peaceful way and on the most trivial of pretexts. The young wife, now freed of all her chains, returns to her parents' house to grow her hair, and wait for her real love-partner.

Mills thinks that hardly one per cent of these first marriages lead to permanent unions. Perhaps it is the fear that the girl may die without love experience which is responsible for this strange custom. For nothing appears more deplorable to the Angami than the fate of a luckless, loveless girl in the next world. Virginity wins no halo in the Naga heaven, but is regarded rather as a sin, for has not the deceased failed to fulfil the duties of her earthly life? Just as a girl advertises her new status by growing her hair, the young man boasts of his first love affair by decorating his black loin-cloth with three rows of pure white cowrie shells. While a Don Juan, succeeding either in seducing a married woman or in carrying on a simultaneous love affair with two sisters, proudly adds a fourth string of cowrie shells to his loin-cloth. You cannot help wondering at the consequences of such customs. For what must happen at the marital breakfast-tables of a small Angami settlement when the beau of the village struts about with a new and fourth row of cowries on his kilt?

2

FEASTS OF MERIT

IMPERCEPTIBLY the first grey of dawn crept over the sleeping village as the pale, tired moon sank below the heights of the mountains. Peace lay on the houses, herded together on the crest of the ridge like frightened sheep. A door opened silently, and the figure of a man separated itself from the shadow of one of the houses; shivering, he threw the end of his large cloth over his shoulder and clutched it tightly until it completely enveloped his naked body. The light grew, and shapes of roof and posts began to stand out. On one of the neighbouring houses boldly curved 'house horns' rose against a dun sky. To-day Netsoho saw them without anger in his heart. The sight of them no longer wounded his pride, but only excited his impatience. A few days more and his own gable would carry these same treasured ornaments. How fervently he had longed for them! For his stately house with the rich carvings of buffalo heads and women's breasts seemed quite valueless to him if these—the wooden house-horns—the highest symbol of glory and prestige, were still lacking. But now everything was prepared for the sacrificial feast; and the dreams of last night supplied the necessary good omen. Two strangers, a man and a woman, had come to his house and drunk rice-beer: should this not forbode good luck and wealth? The first pink rays of sun broke through the dawn as Netsoho stood at his house door, turning the events of the last few months over in his mind; an abundant rice-harvest, filling his granaries, had encouraged him to plan a stone-dragging feast; for a long time they had sought for two suitable boulders, but now they had found them, and soon they would stand near the village path—eternal monuments to his glory. During many days he had abstained from the required dishes and separated his bed from the bed of his wife. The women

of his clan had brewed enormous quantities of rice-beer, and a fortune in animals stood ready for the slaughter.

Thick mists still hid the valley and the rice-fields, but already the morning sun had kissed the yellow straw of the roofs so much higher up on the hills and life began to stir in the village. The women hurried down the rough stone steps to the spring, throwing their long shadows in front of them. They had to fill their long bamboo vessels with water and carry them up to the village before the day's work could begin. And then it was not long before a delicate blue cloud hovered above the houses fed by the smoke from hundreds of fires, where breakfasts stood cooking on the hearth.

The day was a feast day, and no one went to the fields. The men and women sat in front of their houses putting the last touches to their ceremonial costume. The young men's head-dresses cost them much trouble. Roll upon roll of white cotton must be bound with scarlet ribbons so firmly on to bearskin frames that, forming semicircular structures, they will support the huge fans of hornbill feathers; each feather adjusted individually, and so loosely that it revolves in the slightest breeze. There were ear ornaments of the glittering wings of the emerald beetle, innumerable necklaces of carneol beads and Tridacna shells, an occasional breast-plate of Job's tears and red goat's hair, and many red and white ribbons that would dangle from the belts. This day was the men's day, and the women were content with their plain cloths dyed blue with indigo, with sticking bundles of red goat's hair into their large brass ear-rings, and squeezing their arms into as many arm-rings as they could lay hands on. All their inspiration and fantasy were centred round their menfolk.

Late in the morning, when all the preparations were completed, small groups streamed towards Netsoho's house. Two choice bulls were tied to the posts of the protruding roof. A man of Netsoho's clan went up to them; he scratched them gently on the forehead, as though to distract their attention from the business in hand; then, pointing his spear behind the shoulder of one of them, he suddenly drove

it home. Stabbed to the heart, the bull plunged forward, moaning horribly; almost at once the second bull was speared. The meat was quickly and skilfully cut up and distributed, not, as one would suppose, in a haphazard manner, but in strict order of precedence, to the dignitaries of the village. Netsoho received one of the hind legs; it was to be his only meat dish during the next fourteen days, for as long as the ceremonies lasted all other flesh was denied him.

The grey-haired Tevo was politely invited into Netsoho's house. There, in solemn silence, Netsoho sat with his wife on the huge rice-pounding table. The Tevo was offered a little rice-beer in a banana-leaf cup. He swallowed it and blessed the couple:—

‘ May your crops be plentiful, may your rice-beer be inexhaustible, and may your health be preserved from all dangers.’

The feast was now formally opened, and all the guests revelled in food and drink. Neither was lacking. Two more bulls, three buffaloes, and one mithan¹ stood tethered to two strong crossed posts on the open space in front of Netsoho's house. Swiftly they ended their lives under the axes of his clansmen. Again and again the dao flashed—crashing down on the neck, often severing the head with a single blow.

But it was not yet time to lose oneself entirely in the enjoyments of the feast for there was still work to be done. When the sun stood high in the sky, Netsoho and his wife, leading the rest of the villagers, followed the steep path down to the forest, through the heavily carved gate, under the branches of the high bamboos, over the ridge to the place where two enormous stone boulders, two slumbering monsters, lay in the jungle. Strong cane ropes were slipped over the stones, which, with tremendous efforts, were hoisted on to the two wooden sledges. Thirty or forty young men strained at the cane ropes, their half-naked bodies glistening with sweat under the midday sun. Muscles

¹ Mithan or gayal (*Bos frontalis*), a species of cattle related to the wild gaur.

tightened and slackened under taut burnished skin as the awkward sledges bumped, stuck, and were dragged yet farther over the rough ground. With their feather crowns, their long white cords fluttering, and those queer swinging 'tails' of floating human hair that are the only remains of a one-time quiver, the men resembled huge grotesque birds of prey hovering about their victim, settling and dispersing again, as the sledges stuck on some root, were freed, and moved on.

It was a restless, violent crowd that wound its way through the sunlit forest. Rhythmical shouts encouraged the sledge-draggers at the steepest parts of the path and mingled with the chirping of the cicadas and the voices of scared parrots. Netsoho alone did not wear the ceremonial dress, but the black, richly-embroidered stone-dragging cloth. Very proudly he headed the procession with his wife.

Near the path to the fields, and close to the stone monuments of other men, two holes had already been dug, and as the sun touched the horizon, Netsoho's stones were allowed to slide into the holes. Netsoho poured rice-beer over the larger stone and smeared its face with the blood of the pure sacrificial animal; his wife poured rice-beer over the smaller stone, and also smeared its face with blood.

'May my meat increase, may my crops increase, may my food last long, may my food not be finished quickly,' they murmured in turn.

This duality is one of the essential features of the whole ceremony; no bachelor may perform the stone-dragging feast. For, just as the larger stone symbolically represents Netsoho, the smaller stone represents his wife.

The ceremony was over. Netsoho uttered a long-drawn-out shout of joy, and the whole crowd took it up. Spears were tossed in the air, daos whirled, as, with singing and dancing, they returned to the village.

There were few in the village who slept that night. Rice-beer flowed freely, and until early morning the fires threw great pools of light into the darkness.

It was not many days before a pair of newly carved house-horns adorned Netsoho's house. On the path to the fields

the two grey stones stand, eternal monuments of Netsoho's glory.

* * * * *

There are hundreds and thousands of megalithic monuments, such as Netsoho erected, standing by the paths near all Angami villages. They are not dumb, mysterious witnesses of a dim grey past, like the menhirs and dolmens of Stonehenge, but a living part of the Naga culture, whose meaning and function are in no way obscure.

The paths approaching any Angami village are lined with these rough stone boulders. They stand in pairs or in long double rows. Wealthy men have set them up during feasts of merit to perpetuate their fame and their generosity. Only at the first feast of the series is the Naga content to erect two stones; to attain the highest heights of prestige requires four, eight, and even ten menhirs. The costs of the feasts and the number of sacrificial animals are exorbitant, even for the first feast, and, since they increase proportionately, only very few men ever complete the full series.

You are apt to wonder at the connection between a man and a stone. What is it that makes people point to a pair of menhirs long after the donor is dead and say, 'This is the dead man and this is his wife'? Is it that the soul of the deceased is believed to enter the stone? No, it is certainly not such a simple idea, for the Angamis believe that at death the real soul travels to some distant land, or, according to another belief, is transformed into a butterfly. But they believe, too, that a part of the soul-substance remains on the earth, and especially attaches itself to the stone a man has erected. It is this part of the soul-substance, or magical virtue, which gave him success and prosperity during his life, and which he has attempted to strengthen and materialize by erecting the menhirs. In this way he leaves his magical virtue behind, so that it may benefit the village long after his death; the stones stand near the paths so that they may shed their virtue on the passing villagers and increase their fertility and the fertility of their crops.

It is for just these reasons that the dead, too, are buried within the village or by the side of the village paths. The

graves sometimes take the form of low stone platforms, which serve the men and women coming to and from the fields as seats and resting-places. On many of these graves there are tallies for the deeds of the dead in this life; large stones to indicate the number of heads captured in war, smaller stones to represent the number of women whose favours he has enjoyed. On one grave, evidently that of a great favourite of the fair sex, I counted sixty-two small stones. Sixty-two loves! What a memory the man must have had! Was it on his death-bed that he recounted his adventures to a friend?

We returned to Kohima after a fortnight's touring. Mills had counted several villages, and heard numerous quarrels, and I had learnt a good deal about the Angamis, and even more of the difficulties of anthropological field work. I was still hopelessly dependent on Mills for translating the Assamese that is used as the *lingua franca* of the Naga Hills. As I found it difficult to understand a single word the prospect of being left to myself, alone in a Naga village, seemed a gloomy one. Once again Mills came to the rescue. He found Nlamo, another Lhota Naga, to teach me Assamese. Nlamo was about twenty years old, and had attained the dream of all mission boys—he had been sent to the 'high school' at Shillong. But, to his great grief, his talents were forced to lie fallow, for, like so many of the so-called 'educated' Nagas, he could find no job in the Hills. The two British officials did not need many clerks, and the postal service is rather undeveloped—for the simple reason that the Nagas cannot read or write. Besides his mother tongue, Nlamo spoke Assamese, a passable English, Hindustani, Bengali, Ao Naga, and a few words of Gurkhali. It was very understandable that he should hate the idea of going back to his village and growing rice for the rest of his life. Teaching a white Sahib seemed to him an admirable job and, curiously enough, he proved a hundred times more efficient than my learned Bengali. I learned Assamese with Nlamo for a few hours every day, and I soon noticed that the Assamese spoken in the Naga Hills has only the faintest resemblance to that classic Assamese with which I had wrestled in London.

Mills was kind enough to invite me to stay in his very comfortable bungalow, and I spent the next two weeks deep in Assamese, visiting the neighbouring Naga villages and questioning, with Nlamo's help, old Angami men about their customs. Mills was away most of the day at his office, but when he came home we often discussed the cases he had dealt with that day. They were always brimful of interest for the anthropologist, and I learnt to understand how deep an insight into the customs and mentality of the natives an official must possess in order to be able to pass judgements that live up to the native standard of right and wrong. To apply rigid regulations and enforce the principles of European law would only create confusion in the minds of the Naga, and do an almost incalculable amount of harm.

While I was with Mills, the Inspector-General of Police paid one of his rare visits to Kohima, and we consequently embarked on a kind of summer season. The six Europeans in the station, five gentlemen and one lady, dined out every night. The first night we dined with the Captain, the next night we dined with the Major, and the night after that we dined with Mills. The boys all moved round with us, helping to prepare the dinner in each bungalow in turn. The food was always very good, but always tasted more or less of chicken. There were only chickens to be had in Kohima. At first sight our social pleasures would appear rather monotonous.

One day, towards the end of the fortnight, I visited Khonoma, one of the most famous Angami villages in the neighbourhood. Its political influence once extended for more than twenty-five miles round. But to-day the men of Khonoma, unable any longer to collect tribute from the weaker villages, have taken to trade. They manufacture many articles of Angami dress, and especially cane armlets and gauntlets, better than any other Naga village.

Khonoma stands on the crest of a ridge, a natural fortress; on all sides the slopes fall away steeply. Stone steps lead up the hill to the gateway in the strong stone wall. The solid wooden door, painted in red, white, and black with symbols of wealth and fertility—mihan heads, drinking-

horns, hornbill feathers, and suns—is an effective defence against any Naga weapon, for no dao could split the thick wood.

The high stone structures built between the houses in the form of truncated pyramids distinguish Khonoma from all other villages. Like mighty towers they rise above the village, glorifying the clans who built them, with what must have been an infinite amount of labour. The Nagas, unlike many other primitive peoples, expend much trouble on things of little practical use, merely to enhance the social prestige of the individual or the community. Many generations ago stone circles, enclosed by squared stone blocks, were built for such reasons in Khonoma. They were erected by men of fabulous wealth, as the highest stage in the series of the feasts of merit; to-day they serve as dancing-places and the village elders sit on the stone blocks watching the performance. 'The elders, however, sat on smoothed stones in the sacred circle', runs a line in Homer.¹ In the Naga Hills Homeric times are alive to-day and a megalithic culture, which in Europe belonged to the late Stone Age, still flourishes among the Angamis.

¹ *Iliad XVIII.* 503–504.

3

AN ORGY IN STONE

SWARMS of shrieking parrots flew off low boughs as Mills and I approached the clearing. Their jerking flight aimed at the highest branches of a tall tree, jutting out, dry and fantastic, from the entanglement of exuberant creepers. Thousands of clamouring arms clawed in deadly embrace at the gnarled trunk, and, gradually climbing higher and higher, they must have finally suffocated the giant tree. And now the tree was dead; the next storm would probably fell it, and with it those living fetters would themselves be cast upon the ground to lie in tangled heaps, thickening the thicket and making the jungle even more impenetrable. A little way off rose the red-brick ruins of a powerful gateway; the reliefs on the withered façade still spared by time reminded me in some way of late Hindu art. It was the gate of the old Kachari capital, which flourished here until the fifteenth century. The Kacharis spoke a Tibeto-Burman language, and their rule had once extended over the plains of Assam, from the foothills of the Himalayas almost to the frontier of Burma. Here, on the edge of the immense Nambur forest, had stood their capital, Dimapur, 'City of the River People'; lying close to the banks of the Dhansiri River, and the proud possessor of numerous large water-tanks, its name seems to have been thoroughly justifiable.

We passed out through the arch of the gateway, and found ourselves once more under high trees. No fallen wall bears testimony to the palace of the King who once received tribute from the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. For his capital was a bamboo city. Bamboo poles carried the wooden buildings; light and perishable, but singularly suitable for this damp ground, flooded again and again by the waters of Dhansiri. My eyes fell on a huge tank overgrown with tangled masses of that peculiar vivid green that

marsh-plants take when they creep along the surface of open water. What could have induced a people, living almost on the banks of the Dhansiri River, to construct artificial tanks within the precincts of their capital? Mills offered a simple explanation. To build houses out of the reach of flood-water, earth must be heaped in great mounds and in the rainy season the resulting pits fill automatically with water. Not altogether unwelcome, perhaps, in the heat of the Assam summer.

As the jungle thinned, the path opened out on to a large space. An overwhelmingly grotesque sight riveted my attention. Well over fifty gigantic stone monuments stood against an orange evening sky. Some were cracked or in some places chipped, but others remained in almost unharmed splendour. An orgy of fertility symbols in stone had long outlived the fall of a mighty empire. Each of the monoliths represented a phallus surpassing in realism any of the stone lingams of the Hindu god Shiva; between the phalli there stood colossal forked stones in the shape of the letter V: the symbols of the female complement. The tallest of the phalli is well over twenty feet high, and five men with arms outstretched could scarcely encircle it. Most of the monoliths are decorated with reliefs: peacocks, the royal heraldic animal of Kachar, parrots, buffaloes, and various kinds of plants. On one of the stones the image of a human head on a pole is clearly distinguishable. It would seem that the Kacharis of those days practised a custom prevalent among some of the Naga Tribes to-day—that of hoisting the heads of their enemies on tall poles of bamboo.

It is difficult to understand the full implication of so many enormous symbols of human fertility. What mentality can have given birth to the idea of adorning a city with colossal representations of the male and female generative organs? In the whole of India there is no parallel to the monuments of Dimapur, and we would despair completely of ever explaining their meaning had we no knowledge of the megalithic rites of the Nagas, the immediate neighbours of the Kacharis. For they not only set up rough unworked

menhirs during their feasts of merit, but also wooden forked posts and carved wooden phalli. It is this conformity of shape which excludes any doubt as to the relationship between the wooden monuments of the Nagas and the stone monoliths of the Kacharis.

The phalli and forked stone monuments of the kings of Kachar are evidently the memorials of great sacrificial feasts, when the blood of hecatombs of bulls and buffaloes flooded the sacred place. The character of these feasts as fertility rites is more clearly pronounced among the Kacharis than in the megalithic ceremonial of the Nagas. But in both ceremonials the perpetuation of the rite stands very much to the fore; houses, and even palaces, may be built of wood or bamboo, but stone must immortalize the monuments of the sacrificial feasts, through the changing face of time, and with them the fertilizing power of the rite. The Kachari religion at the time of Dimapur's greatness appears to have resembled in many respects the religions found to-day among the Tibeto-Burman hill tribes. Hinduism had not yet conquered the valley of Assam, though its influence is already noticeable in the art of Dimapur.

During the sixteenth century the power of the Kachari kings was shattered by the attacks of the Ahoms invading Assam. After a prolonged struggle the Ahoms captured and looted the capital Dimapur, and the Kacharis retreated to the south-west. There they lived under their own rulers until the occupation of the country by the British in 1830.

We know little or nothing of the relations between the Kacharis and the neighbouring Naga tribes. But the chronicles of the Ahom kings, the heirs to their might, record fierce fights, as well as peaceful dealings with the inhabitants of numerous Naga villages. These chronicles, or, as they are called, the Ahom Buranjis, reflect events much the same as took place in other parts of the world when warlike conquerors of higher civilization and superior organization came into contact with an aboriginal and primitive population.

The oldest of the reports date from the thirteenth century, when Shukapha, the Ahom King, came with his army over

the mountains from Burma. Passing through the land of the Nagas, he conquered many villages with the greatest cruelty.

‘A great number of the Nagas were killed and many were made captives,’ reports the chronicle; ‘some Nagas were cut to pieces and their flesh cooked. Then the King made a younger brother eat the cooked flesh of his elder brother and a father of his sons. Thus Shukapha destroyed the Naga villages.’

The Nagas do not lack the taste for a gay and thrilling raid or the cutting off of a few enemy heads, but they certainly did not appreciate such refinements of Ahom civilization; in the years to come they often stood out in open rebellion. About the year 1400, the Ahom kings, deciding to change their tactics, invited a great number of Nagas to a feast; during the meal the unsuspecting guests were set upon and murdered. ‘Their heads were placed on a big stone in the form of a garland.’

This, however, did not contribute in any way to pacification and during the fifteenth century the wars with the Nagas, and particularly with the restless tribes of the Konyaks, became more and more frequent. Yet there were times when the relations between the Ahoms and Nagas seem to have been quite friendly. For, of the visit of several Nagas to King Suchaupha, the chronicle contains the following idyllic report:—

‘They came to take their presents from our King at Itanagar. The heavenly King spread two gorgeous cloths and having seated himself thereon taught them rules. On that day they drank with fear. The great King drank with them with drooping head and placing one leg upon the other.’

Traditions of the Konyak Nagas tell of an Ahom King who, fleeing from his enemies into the hills, found refuge in the village of Tanhai. He married the daughter of the chief, and even to-day the people of Tanhai point to the stone which served the exiled King as a seat. Apparently the cultural differences between the Ahoms and the Nagas were not insurmountable, and the ‘savage’ Nagas proved

more human than the proud rulers of the Ahom kingdom.

But in the hot, fertile plains of Assam, the Ahoms, like the Kacharis before them, relapsed gradually into decadence. Fiery warriors turned to peaceful peasants, and their small settlements often fell victims to the raiding Nagas from the near-by mountains. The taking of a head from the villages of the plains became a convenient habit, and one that was hard to extirpate even after the country was taken over by the British. Till quite recently a tea-garden coolie would now and then disappear in some mysterious way!

The ruins of Dimapur lie quite near the railway station of Manipur Road, and from there Mills and I took a train to Simaluguri, about 200 miles away. The railway runs in a north-easterly direction along the foothills of the Naga country, and from Simaluguri it is two days' march to the land of the Konyaks, where I intended to settle down. We could have reached it without leaving the hills by taking the direct bridle-path from Kohima, but such a tour would have taken at least twelve days.

A narrow-gauge railway connects Simaluguri with Naginimara, and then it is only four miles to the colliery of Borjan on the very borders of the Konyak country. Railway traffic on this branch line is distinctly primitive, and since there is only one passenger train a week, Mr. Castles, the manager of the colliery, had sent us down his trolley. The trolley was just a platform on wheels, sideless, with two benches for passengers; it was propelled in much the same way as a small boy's 'kiddie car'—by means of a hand-lever. We mounted this strange vehicle and the three coolies sat behind and worked the hand-lever backwards and forwards. The track was more or less level, and we moved fairly quickly; but we had an exhausting time, shouting and screaming most of the way to disturb the cows and goats peacefully grazing on the lines. They had told us at Simaluguri that a down train was expected; so we made our way cautiously round the bends lest the approaching express should catch us on the single track unprepared. But we need not have worried, for when the train finally appeared,

puffing and rattling, we had been amply forewarned. We lifted the trolley neatly from the rails, allowed the train to pass, and replaced our vehicle. A simple method of shunting!

It had become very hot, and after riding through the stifling jungle, we arrived at Borjan covered with sweat. Mr. Castles was charming, and received us with that matter-of-fact hospitality which I found only in India. He received us, too, with what we had been longing for during many weeks: iced beer. On all our future tours Castles' beer became proverbial and often, when we had climbed some 3000 feet up a sunny slope, I would ask Mills, 'What would you give now for a glass of Castles' iced beer?'

The electric current at the disposal of managers of collieries, factories, and tea-gardens, permitting the installation of ventilators and frigidaires, incites the envy of Government officials in those remote parts. Such luxury is usually denied to them, and they work in hot offices and drink warm whisky.

In the following twelve months Castles' bungalow became for me the very essence of civilization. Here, only a few days' march, and sometimes only a few miles away from the villages where I slept in Naga huts or a stuffy tent, drank coffee-brown water, ate bony chickens, and was myself devoured by hosts of mosquitoes—here was a mosquito-proof bungalow with electric fans, bathrooms, wireless, good food, and—iced beer. It required not a little self-restraint to stay away, often for months at a time; but I shall never forget Castles' hospitality and his iced beer, which I enjoyed on more than one occasion.

4

ABOVE THE CLOUDS

THIN mist filled the forest, and the trunks of the huge liana-clad trees rose steep and straight to their first spreading branches, and then they faded and were lost with the leaves in the grey haze. Heavy drops dripped from the damp foliage, sinking soundlessly into a ground covered with rotting leaves. For hours we had climbed through the silent forest, that seemed to grow denser and denser, and even more luxuriant, with every step; no human axe could have disturbed this forest for hundreds of years. Were the mountain slopes too steep for cultivation, or did the Konyaks, owning so much land, think it scarcely worth their while to clear away these age-old trees? We did not pass a single field on the whole day's climb.

We were already high up—certainly well over 4000 feet—and there was still no trace of the village, when at last some men emerged from the mist. Halting near a spring, they had waited for us, and passed the time by boiling tea over a small fire. They were Konyaks from Wakching—Konyaks from the very village where I wanted to work. I looked them over anxiously, wondering whether I could succeed in making friends with them. At first sight they seemed anything but prepossessing. Those horrible mouths! Smiles showed double rows of coal-black teeth, lips, red from chewing betel, with pinkish saliva dripping from the corners. But the magnificent orchid one young man wore in the lobe of his ear shone as a bright star in the dark night. Can those who wear flowers in their ears be absolutely charmless? I did not know that this young man—it was Shankok—would become my best friend. I never found a better friend, either among the Nagas or in Europe.

The men from Wakching offered us tea; it tasted dreadfully bitter. But this was not really surprising, for the leaves had been boiling in water for a long time and the beverage

was now a deep brown colour. Why did these Nagas offer us tea? I began to long for the good Angami rice-beer.

Mills chatted with the men. He knew some of them well, for he had been to Wakching before. They talked fluent Assamese. This was a great advantage, for I would have found it quite hopeless to try to learn the language of Wakching, as well as Assamese, in those first weeks.

The Konyaks reached up to somewhere near Mills' shoulder, but their slim bodies were so beautifully proportioned that, living alone among them, I quite forgot my first impression, and thought of them as quite normal-sized people. The gaonburas had donned their red Government cloths to welcome us. They wore them with great dignity, one end tossed carelessly over the shoulder, in much the same way as a proud Roman wore his toga. Under their Government cloths they wore their everyday dress—that is, they wore tight cane belts, or belts of the bark of the 'agar' tree (*Aquilaria appallocha*), with a small apron hanging down in front. The small apron is quite a recent custom and has only developed among the Konyaks, as trade with the inhabitants of the plains increased. But the old men of Wakching do not hold with such new-fangled fashions, and stick to the good old custom of belt without apron. Farther in the hills, young and old alike go about completely naked, for they still live in the good old times. And so the Konyaks are still the 'Naked Nagas'.

When we arrived at Wakching a teasing fog blotted out all vision. We were in the clouds, those clouds which lay only too often like a blanket over the ridge of Wakching. Whenever there was anything exciting to photograph, the clouds would rise from the valleys and hang about our mountain, until my subject was no longer exciting or there was absolutely no light left.

But on the first day of my arrival the fog showed some consideration, and as we reached the inspection bungalow, standing on open ground a little outside the village, the clouds broke, and the most magnificent view lay before us in the light of the evening sun.

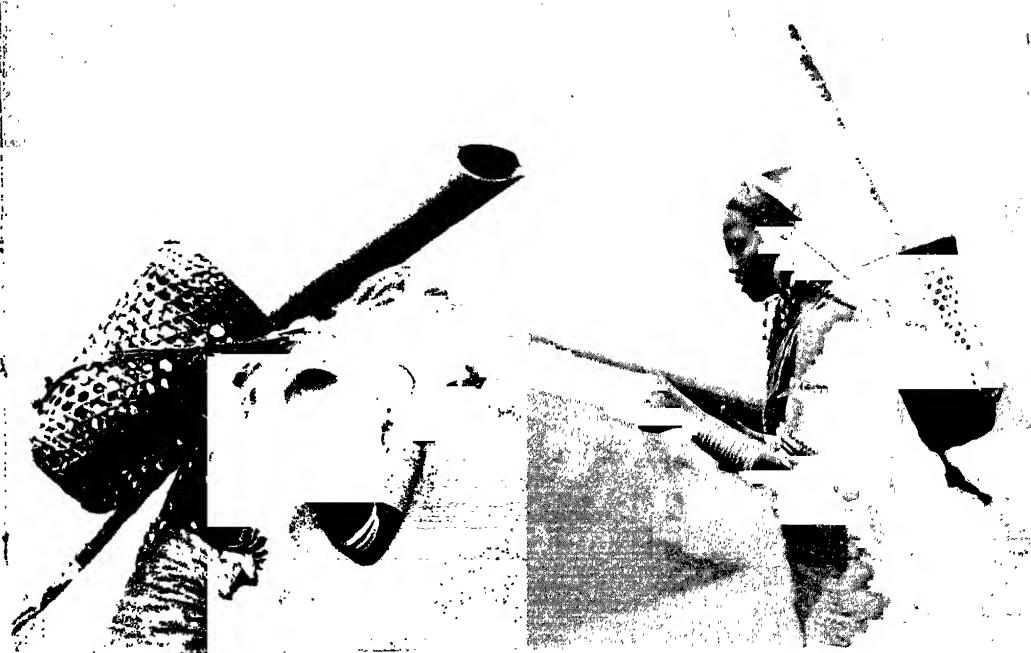
East and south, slopes green with young rice curved into

a deep wooded valley. It was the valley of the Sinyang River, and, standing there, Mills made me promise never, under any circumstance, to cross it. This was a hard promise to give—harder certainly than the other promise already made: not to interfere with native women! For the Sinyang formed the boundary between British India and the unadministered and partly unexplored territory, where war and head-hunting still run rife, and across it lay the promised land, that I was to look on, but not to enter for many long months. On the crests of the mountains, sweeping up from that valley, I could see with my naked eye brown patches that were 'neighbouring' villages. Beyond rose the peaks of a still higher range, lying not in Assam, but in Burma. The frontier running along the Patkoi Range is of little practical importance, for on both sides extends a more or less unknown area, and it is here that the maps show most of the white patches.

Day after day I looked over this untouched country, that stretched from my very door, and one clear night, standing before my bungalow, I watched the results of war between two villages: on one of the mountains the fields of a village had been set alight, and the whole night long a line of sprouting flame climbed steadily up, though it never reached the hostile village.

From the other side of the bungalow I looked over the broad valley of the Brahmaputra to the foothills of the Himalayas. On clear mornings their snow caps shone white against the horizon, but it was in the evenings, after a particularly lovely day, that this view was most beautiful. Then the setting sun would fill the whole valley with yellow light, and the winding ribbon of the Brahmaputra would stand out like shining gold. Long after I had left Wakching, in the middle of a crowded city, or exasperated by some triviality of civilization, or even quite unexpectedly in the course of my daily life when something reminded me of the Konyaks, I longed for that wide untrammelled view stretching to all points of the compass.

When I woke up on the morning after our arrival, it seemed as though we were on an island, or rather on one of



3. Ngapnun of Longkhai giving a friend a drink on the way from the spring

4. View over the Konyak country from Wakching



benefits the seed-rice heaped in the storing-baskets inside the granaries.

At the entrance of the village proper a mighty rubber-tree stretched in a wide bow over the path. It was that species of ficus, whose hanging branches, growing anew into the ground, form countless pillars about the mother stem. Connected with the men's house by a gangway on high bamboos, this giant tree served in former times as a village look-out. From here sentries watched over the paths leading deep down through the fields; no movement stirring in the country round would have escaped their notice, and their warning shouts would have alarmed the villagers on even the most distant fields.

The men's house, or 'morung', appeared, with its open front, like the wide-open mouth of some gigantic whale; numerous carved sticks and boards, dangling from the eaves, sounded softly as the wind hit them one against the other. Powerful posts carried the palm-thatched roof, and four gable carvings, painted a faint red and forming the happiest contrast against a delicate blue sky, stretched their arms heavenwards. High up on these carved gables three horn-bills perched, as though taking the whole house under the protection of their wings. These sacred birds, with their enormous beaks, formed, with tigers, elephants, snakes, and humans, the main motifs of the manifold carvings on the coloured frieze. Differences of sex were emphasized clearly, though not always with great delicacy.

Fantastic carvings adorned the open porch of the morung—the head and tusks of an elephant, a life-sized leopard running head downwards, and two warriors, holding captured heads in their hands, flanked the open doorways, leading to the central hall. Crudely painted in red, white, and black, these doorways reminded you of an ultra-modern theatre *décor*. There were also carvings of love-couples, and if these representations are to be believed, love among the Konyaks would appear a rather uncomfortable and hurried affair.

A few men sat about on the open porch. How oblivious they seemed of all these vivid carvings! I suppose you

would get used to rubbing shoulders with the tusks of an elephant, to finding yourself slipping into the open jaws of a python after a doze in the midday sun, or, coming home late at night, perhaps a little the worse for too much rice-beer, to discovering a prowling leopard before your door. But all gold loses its glitter, and these men seemed complacent enough, plaiting their baskets and mending their fishing-nets. It was only our arrival that caused them to drop their work; a white man in Wakching is still a sensational event, and even Mills had not visited the village for more than six years.

One of the men had a pretty box, carved in the shape of a human head, and Mills bought it for one rupee. The happy owner of such unexpected wealth looked with incredulous eyes at the silver coin that seemed to him quite out of proportion to the value of his little box. I decided to take advantage of this *naïveté*, but hardly had I started a systematic collection than the people adjusted their mentality and began to ask boom-prices. The Konyaks have learnt very quickly to understand the value of money and to think in terms of rupees instead of in terms of rice. Money is now gradually taking the place of barter, even in trade with the villages in the interior. Of the three articles that find their way most swiftly into Naga culture, taking their places as though they had always existed—money, matches, and umbrellas—the Konyaks have acquired only two: money and matches. But no self-respecting Angami will ever leave his village in summer without an umbrella. With an annual rainfall of about 250 inches, you can hardly blame the Angami for his predilection for umbrellas.

The Konyaks, however, are not so particular. They do not in the least mind getting wet, for, unlike the Angami, they seldom wear clothes that are in any way damageable, and they are philosophical enough to know that they are only really safe from the rain and cold in their well-built houses. With their thick roofs of palm-leaf bundles, pulled well down like warm arctic caps, these Konyak houses give you at once a comfortable impression; and there must be many a family in Europe crowded together in some diminutive city apart-

ment, who would be happy to have such a spacious dwelling. True, the insides of the houses are dark, but, probably for this reason, most of the daily life goes on upon the open platforms at the back. From here you can watch the neighbours at their work and you have a nice view over the little kitchen-gardens, with their flaming red and yellow flowers, which the boys and men, but never the girls, like to wear in their ear-lobes. These carefully fenced-in little gardens are almost the only places where one is quite safe from the innumerable black pigs; those village pests, which yet constitute the village wealth. With their squeaking off-spring they roam about in and between the houses, and walking through the village on a hot summer afternoon, you might suppose that it is exclusively inhabited by black pigs. They are ugly but useful animals, and do their best to keep the village free of rubbish and refuse; at feasts they are indispensable, and it is hard to think of a Naga ceremony without the savoury smell—forestalling the savoury taste—of roast pork.

Narrow paths thread the thicket, growing rank on all ground not cleared for building; an abandoned house does not stand empty long, for the jungle soon takes possession. It was a long time before I learnt to know my way about the village, the steep and stony paths, and the damp and overgrown ones. For two hundred and fifty houses seem to have been almost inconsequently dotted over the hill-side, with five mighty morungs protecting the entrances. Wakching is a strong village, and not so long ago it stretched a war-like arm to the very edge of the Assam plains, extorting various tributes from the helpless peasants. To-day fourteen Konyak villages, some lying as much as two days' march distant, pay tribute to Wakching.

When we returned to the bungalow after a whole morning's visit in the village, we found it surrounded by a strange crowd, squatting on the ground and chewing betel. Their faces—they struck me first—were covered with intertwined lines of rich blue tattoo, like pictures I had seen of old Maori chiefs; the lines wound in curves and twists round the eyes, nose, and mouth. Tight cane-belt pulled in waists to aston-

ishingly small proportions; the wasp-like waists of the early years of the century came to my mind, and those caricatures of what seem to us ridiculous fashions. But there was nothing ridiculous about these men. Their slim bodies, more elegant and supple than those of the Wakching men, were really beautiful, and even their fantastic head-dresses, worthy of any carnival, did not weaken this impression. Boars' tusks, goats' hair dyed red, monkey and bear fur, and great hornbill feathers were all in some way or other attached to the small cane hats perched on the top of their heads. Straight black hair was tied in a firm knot at the back, and flat pieces of wood, flying tails of goat's hair, stuck horizontally through the knot. Sometimes the ends of these flat pieces of wood bore the carvings of miniature heads, and these, we were told, tallied with the enemy heads the wearer had helped to capture.

One man, with a head-dress of a monkey skull, framed in boar's tusk, seemed to stand out from all this motley crowd. White conch-shells covered his ears, and serow horns were stuck through the lobes; he wore heavy ivory armlets and red-cane rings on his arms, and his legs were encased in rings of cowrie shells and more of the red-cane rings.

But it was his self-possession and his composure, even more than his head-dress and fine ornaments, that distinguished him from those surrounding him. You do not expect to find such composure among those termed 'savages', and I was distinctly surprised at his obviously princely bearing. This was the chief of Sheangha, a village lying outside British territory, who, hearing of Mills' arrival, had come to pay him a visit. The relations between the independent chiefs beyond the border and the officials of the neighbouring Naga Hills District are of a rather curious kind, depending more or less on the personality of the Deputy-Commissioner himself. Without in any way giving up their sovereignty in their own territory, the autocratic village chiefs sometimes invite the 'Great Sahib', as they call the Deputy-Commissioner, to act as mediator in settling their long-drawn-out tribal feuds. Mills, for years Subdivisional Officer at Mokochung, from where the Konyak area is

administered, knew most of the chiefs beyond the frontier personally, and he possessed considerable influence and authority among them. But when Nagas from across the frontier raid villages in British territory, the Deputy-Commissioner no longer acts merely as mediator; he usually calls the offender quickly to account, and even undertakes punitive expeditions against hostile villages when he considers it necessary. Fortunately such actions are extremely rare, for the chiefs usually know just how far they can go!

The appearance of the chief of Sheangha, and the deference with which his followers and even the Wakching men treated him, were quite different from anything I had hitherto experienced in the Naga Hills. The autocratic chiefs or Angs of the Konyaks hold a unique position in these hills. They are the undisputed rulers in their own villages and all the villages under their overlordship. Their person is sacred, and no commoner ever approaches them upright. Now I understood the crouching figures of servants as they passed before the Ang of Sheangha, or literally crept up to offer him betel leaves.

The Ang of Sheangha brought Mills a goat as a gift of welcome, and Mills entertained him and his suite with a few cups of rum; I gave them several packets of cigarettes, and then they went happily home. Curiously enough, even those Konyaks who are only used to chewing their own rough, home-grown tobacco, greatly value cigarettes when they are offered to them for the first time.

Many other people from across the frontier had come to welcome Mills, but the powerful Ang of the near-by village of Chi sent his excuses. He could not spend the night in Wakching, he said, as there was dysentery in the village, and to sleep in the huts near the bungalow where our boys put up was beneath his dignity. But the youths bringing this message proudly wore the fresh tattoo of head-hunters on the forehead and cheeks. Was it entirely on account of the dysentery that the Ang of Chi would not come to greet Mills? No; Chi had recently taken a head from Totok. Both Chi and Totok are clearly visible from Wakching; lying a short distance from one another on two neighbouring

mountains, they have been at war for many years. This feud taking place just outside British territory, but involving on more than one occasion people from administered villages, had long been the cause of anxiety—to say nothing of anger—to the Subdivisional Officer at Mokokchung.

The next day we visited the small village of Shiong. Though lying with its fifty houses hardly one hour's march away, it is astonishingly different from Wakching. Even the languages of the two villages have little resemblance, and though most of the men comprehend their neighbour's speech quite well, the women, who do not go about very much, cannot understand each other at all. A very intelligent Wakching boy, whose mother came from Shiong, told me that, though he could speak a little Assamese, he could not say a single word to his mother's relations. This difference in language was not, as I ascertained later, restricted only to the vocabulary, but applies also to the phonetic system. If you go a few miles farther, you come to Tanhai, where the people speak yet another language, and on a two days' march you can easily pass through four distinct language-areas. It was well that we took three Konyak *dobashis* with us; they had to translate the language in question into the usual Naga Assamese. Talking among themselves, each of the three spoke his own language, the others understanding, but not being able to speak it without difficulty.

Yes, Shiong is very different from Wakching. The men tattoo their faces and wear the same coiffure that we had so much admired on the Sheangha men. Long, luxuriant hair is their pride, but the Wakching men, far from envying long hair, cut their own short, and are not impressed with their neighbour's hairdress. Nor are they impressed with the dress of their neighbours' girls. Quite on the contrary, the fashion of the fair sex of Shiong is a source of continual hilarity to the men of Wakching. For the skirt of a Shiong belle is little more than a hand's width, while a respectable Wakching-woman wears this only piece of clothing at least two or three hands wide. Is it not strange that the youths of Wakching should delight in making fun of the 'naked girls' of Shiong? Can two hands' width on a skirt really

make so much difference? But their disapproval is not due to the 'moral indignation' that makes a puritan of the Middle West condemn a too scanty bathing-suit; it is due rather to the feeling that these girls, through their nakedness, are deprived of all erotic attraction. To run about in a skirt that excites no curiosity, so 'that no man wants to look at them'—isn't that a shame?

I must admit that I could never share the opinion of my Wakching friends; for me the missing width of skirt did not lessen the charm of the Shiong girls. Perhaps we, my Wakching friends and I, looked at charm from two different angles. In any case, I found those girls very pretty indeed. Climbing up the steep mountain with their high loads of fire-wood, their lithe, elastic bodies seemed immensely more beautiful than the figures on many a fashionable bathing-beach. I never saw a fat Konyak woman; even after innumerable pregnancies they preserve the slimness of youth in some miraculous way, and you are spared the sight of those pendulous breasts which you find so frequently in Africa.

In Shiong we were first entertained in the house of Ahon. He was an old friend of Mills and only too pleased to see him again, his whole household assembled to welcome us, and the hostess never allowed our rice-beer mugs to stand empty. I am afraid, however, that, fresh from the over-anxious atmosphere of Europe, I could not help feeling that it was just the hostess that presented one of the drawbacks to that otherwise well-assorted household—for the hostess was a leper. Ahon, too, must have come to the conclusion that in the long run a wife with leprosy is not very pleasant, for he had married a second wife, his first wife's cousin, and they have seven children. But the first wife—the leper—continued to live in the house, attending to her duties as best she could. And as she had not so far infected any of the members of the family, my prejudice against leprosy was somewhat appeased. If you are afraid of leprosy—and it is a sorry sight—you had better not go to Shiong, for the place is full of lepers; but after a time, if you can overcome your aversion, you get quite used to these poor stricken

creatures. Even in Wakching, where we had only four lepers, the people could not make up their minds either to isolate or to settle them outside the village. The kind-hearted Konyaks refuse to exile poor, sick members of the community. 'After all, they are our brothers', I often heard them say. 'How should we chase them out of the village?' How magnanimous are these savages! For they are fully aware that this 'evil illness', as they call leprosy, is contagious.

But leper-wife or no leper-wife, I had to make friends with Ahon. He had once served the Government as a dobashi, and knew the country beyond the frontier as well as his own home. He was an excellent informant not only on the customs of Shiong, but also on those of Chi. For Chi was his home village, and he had been forced to leave it only when he came into conflict with the autocratic chief. By serving the Government, and through his numerous connexions with the neighbouring villages, he had gradually made his fortune and nowadays his influence surpassed that of many smaller Angs. But in his heart he still hated all chiefs, and even in Shiong, where he lived quite peacefully, he was on very strained terms with the Ang, a cousin and vassal of the Great Ang of Chi.

Ahon loved to tell stories of the less glorious deeds and fates of the Great Angs. He would spend hours relating how the Ang of such and such a village committed such and such dastardly deeds: all typical of Angs in general. And, as I thought, typical of the Konyaks in general, for their lives, certainly in the unadministered area, are still, as they have been for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, full of murders and betrayals and cutting off of heads. One day, walking along the path to Tanhai, he recounted with great relish the story of the quarrels for the throne of Hangnyu, a village about sixteen miles north-east of Wakching.

It appears that twenty years ago the old Ang of Hangnyu died; and his two sons and his brother quarrelled over the succession. By right, his eldest son Auwang should have become Ang, but he was so young that his uncle hoped to supersede him. Time is not very important in Konyak

villages, and the quarrel dragged on for some time, until the old men of Hangnyu, growing restless, sent a message to the powerful Ang of Chi, asking him to send one of his brothers as Ang to Hangnyu. In itself this would have been nothing unusual, for just as the Balkan countries have received their dynasties from the other royal houses of Europe, so the Konyaks often 'called' their Angs from other villages. But the Ang of Chi, realizing that he could only aggravate the situation, refused the offer: the ruling house of Hangnyu was not yet extinct, he said, and there still remained two pretenders to the throne. But the people of Hangnyu, anxious to set their affairs in order, sent a message to the Ang of Pomau, who, not so wise as the Ang of Chi, sent his ambitious brother Kiwang to accept the throne of Hangnyu.

At first all went well with the village of Hangnyu and its Ang Kiwang; he succeeded in defeating the hostile village of Tang, and quite a number of heads were captured. But not many years had passed before misfortune followed misfortune: Kiwang's wife, of the chiefly house of Mon, died, and soon her only son followed her. And though Kiwang had numerous other children in the dark rooms of his long house, none of those sons could ever succeed him on the throne of Hangnyu, for their mothers were commoners, and the pure blood of the chiefs did not flow in their veins. Then several bad harvests shrunk the wealth of the village so much that Kiwang often found difficulty in providing the necessary number of buffaloes and pigs for the spring festival, and Tang, reversing the fortunes of war, raided a fishing expedition and captured no less than nine heads on a single day.

The villagers—rather unjustly, I thought—held Kiwang responsible for all these misfortunes, and the now grown-up sons of the old chief only further embarrassed his position. Day by day the resistance to his power grew; his orders were ignored, only scanty tribute was paid, and his fields were neglected by his unwilling subjects. Finally the chief's sons, confirming his disgrace, publicly and ostentatiously ate the right hind-leg of a buffalo sacrificed

at the rebuilding of a morung—by right the share of the Ang.

Kiwang knew that his days in Hangnyu were numbered and he secretly sent messengers to his brother, the Ang of Pomau. But how could Ato, the mighty lord of Pomau, appreciate the prospect of Kiwang's resignation? Would it not mean a loss of prestige for his whole house? His advice was not to precipitate matters; for though he could not openly interfere, he would invite the arrogant young Angs to a feast in Pomau and murder them. The trap was betrayed, however, and only one of the young Angs, Lowang, accepted the invitation; he arrived with an enormous escort of warriors, and they took great care never to let their weapons out of their hands. With icy politeness Lowang thanked Ato for his lavish feast and returned to Hangnyu, where he and his brother immediately dethroned and banished Kiwang. But the story did not end here, for many followers and servants had come to Hangnyu with Kiwang; they had built houses and acquired fields in Hangnyu, and their sons and daughters had grown up and found mates in Hangnyu. Were they now to return landless to Pomau? No, they had become Hangnyu people, and Hangnyu people they wanted to remain. 'Well, if you are Hangnyu men, why don't you fetch us a few heads from Pomau?' Mockingly the words had been said, but four of Kiwang's one-time followers took them all too seriously.

They crept into Pomau on a moonless night and cut off the heads of an unsuspecting sleeping couple. Unfortunately the deed was immediately discovered, and the Pomau warriors took up the pursuit of the raiders. Only one escaped; two were overtaken and put to death, and the fourth man, fleeing into the forest, climbed a tree, hoping to put his pursuers off the scent. In the morning the warriors found him. They surrounded the tree and held council. But the case was a difficult one. Under cover of darkness, and ignorant of their identity, they had killed two murderers; but now the light of day revealed with whom they had to deal, and though the crime, violating the most

sacred bonds of the village community, had to be punished, their hands were tied, tied by the strictest of all taboos, which forbids the shedding of a relative's blood. There was only one way to end the ghastly, unprecedented situation: the Ang himself must intervene, for he stood above all taboos, and was so filled with magical power that nothing, not even the killing of a man of his own village, could harm him. So the old Ang Ato climbed a neighbouring tree, and, taking his muzzle-loader, shot the offender. Auwang ascended the throne of his father, and still rules in Hangnyu.

Mills was to try a case while he was in the Konyak country. It concerned the taking of heads, and since Konyak villages inside British territory, as well as villages across the border, were involved, Mills had decided to save the people the long march to Wakching and to hold the court at Tanhai. We started early in the morning; the path, soaked by the night's rain, led first through a belt of forest, and then down over slippery steps cut into the ground, and finally through high grass and bush. On the boundary of the Wakching land, we found two crossed reeds blocking the path. The men of Sheangha had set them up; returning from Wakching two days before, they had thought to foil the following spirits of disease, when they left the land of the infected village, by crawling through the arch. The spirits were obliging, for we never heard of a case of dysentery that month in Sheangha.

The house of the Ang stands in the centre of the village of Tanhai. It is a long, low building, divided into numerous small rooms. At the back, and partly covered by the roof, a platform is built out over the slope. Generally, the women spin and weave, clean taro, and spread the drying rice on this platform; but to-day it was transformed; for the 'Great Sahib', lord over 178,000 Nagas, was to hold his court here, question his witnesses, and pass his judgement. It was a very important day for Tanhai.

The case Mills had to try was a difficult one. I was glad it was Mills who had to try this case. Reviewing the facts, I felt like a very young spaniel who, having chased a particularly elusive rabbit to its burrow, perceives that there

are innumerable other holes by which his prey could escape. A woman of Chen, a village lying in unadministered country, had lost her head; so far it was simple; the rabbit had gone to ground! The men of Sheangha, a colony of the great Sheangha, admitted the capture of the head. They said that they wished to send it as a present to the Ang of Mon, for the Ang of Mon had recently had much misfortune: he had lost his house and the whole of his collection of more than a hundred heads by fire. But the hostile village of Tang lay on the path between Sheangha and Mon. Sheangha gave this reason for employing two youths of Hungphoi to convey their gift. Hungphoi is friendly with Mon and it is friendly with Tang; and besides, Hungphoi lies in administered country, which more or less guaranteed a safe conduct to the youths in the neighbouring independent villages. According to the boys' story, they had done nothing but carry the head from Sheangha to Mon, this undertaking alone entitling them to the face-tattoo in whose new splendour they obviously gloried.

The trial proceeded in the most friendly fashion. It was rather like an informal gathering on the side of the fields, when you stop to discuss the state of the rice-harvest. Defendants, witnesses, dobashis, and spectators all squatted in front of us, arms resting on drawn-up knees and mouths casually chewing betel. Some of them had dressed up for the occasion, and had wrapped themselves in cloths, but the majority of the men wore only cane belts, with the little apron hanging down in front. Women and children assembled in the background, only too eager to enjoy the unique sensation of two white men.

The accused Hungphoi youths came in leisurely—they were not led in by force; indeed, they had come quite voluntarily, and even Sheangha, lying outside the proper jurisdiction of the Deputy-Commissioner, had sent representatives. The dobashis, Ahon of Shiong and Chingai of Oting, translated the evidence from the various tongues into Assamese—inevitably adding their own opinion to every testimony. Of course two dobashis mean the possibility of two different opinions, and this is just what

happened. The two dobashis disagreed on the most crucial point. There was a suspicion that the two heroes of Hungphoi were not so blameless as they made out; that they had not only conveyed the strange present to the Ang of Mon, but had had a hand—perhaps more than a hand—in the capture of the head. This was Ahon's opinion. He explained that the fresh tattoo covered not only the face, but extended in a lace-work pattern down the neck.

Chingai, apparently trying to exonerate the Hungphoi men, pretended that the mere touching of a newly-captured head entitled the wearer to this extensive tattoo.

The intricacies of the case seemed hopeless, for the rules of tattooing are not easily proved, even if they exist at all. In the end Mills, adopting Chingai's view, condemned the Hungphoi boys for the admitted transfer of a head-hunting trophy. Hungphoi was fined two mithan; for the village as a whole, and not the individual, has to pay such fines, since all the men probably share in any guilt there is. Mills also fined Sheangha one mithan for involving British subjects in their own head-hunting raids. I should explain here that the mithan, or gayal, that plays so important a rôle as sacrificial animal among the Nagas, is a species of cattle, black-brown in colour, with white stockings. Like the buffaloes of the Naga, the mithan wander about the jungle in a half-wild condition, their owners feeding them only occasionally with salt. Neither of these animals are milked or in any way used for work, and so, tiring of my daily ration of chicken curry, I decided some weeks later to bring a cow and her calf up from the plains. The cow was called Daisy, after a beautiful girl I had once known in Europe, but I never dared tell her of her namesake, for I wonder if she would have appreciated the compliment. Daisy was the nicest of cows, only she didn't appreciate being milked by Konyaks, and I was lucky if I got even one pint of milk a day.

The trial ended with Hungphoi and Sheangha both promising to pay the imposed fine of mithan, and the youthful offenders went back to their village unscathed. We



5. A Konyak Youth with the face tattoo of a head-hunter

returned to Wakching, climbing up the 1500 feet in a most oppressive heat.

Mills had now finished his work, and he decided to return by quick marches and by way of Mokokchung to Kohima. I wanted to accompany him as far as Mokokchung, for the path from Wakching passes through the country of the Aos, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to get to know these southern neighbours of the Konyaks.

It was drizzling with rain when, early next morning, we walked over the ridge to the neighbouring village of Wanching, and then climbed down innumerable stone steps on the southern side of the mountain. Here, on a stone by the path, we found the claws of a Chinese Pangolin, and the dobashis told us that, according to a Konyak belief, the scratching of the skin with such ant-eater claws soothes the inflammation caused by the touch of hairy centipedes. Some Konyak must have killed a Pangolin, and altruistically left two of the claws in this conspicuous place.

In the forest, only a little below the fields of Wanching, we came upon mounds of giant droppings sprawling over the path. Wild elephants! The Konyaks do not like it when the elephants come up so high, for they are apt to do much damage to the crops, trampling them unheedingly underfoot.

Deep down in the stuffy, jungle-filled valley we crossed the Dikhu River. Its flooded, coffee-brown waters, carrying broken branches and whole uprooted trees, surged and gurgled between its banks. High above, a delicate cane bridge spanned the turbulent waters; suspended by numerous cane ropes from the branches of the high trees on either bank, it seemed as fragile as any fluttering spider's web spun overnight between two bushes. Three or four rows of bamboos formed a floor, and a fairly high, plaited railing provided a certain security, when once you had embarked on this swaying journey. How thankful I was to reach the other side, and, after what seemed an interminable time, to climb down the ladder on to firm ground! Yet our heavily burdened coolies seemed quite unconcerned and quite at ease.

That evening we reached Tamlu, a Konyak village lying about 3000 feet above sea-level on a ridge that rises from the Dikhu valley. Two different languages are spoken in this village: two of the three morungs speak a language particular to Tamlu, while the people of the third morung, whose ancestors immigrated from Tanhai only a few generations ago, speak quite a different language. There was difficulty at first, the people told us, but now the villagers have learnt to understand each other. Recently the linguistic divergency was complicated by a religious controversy. Tamlu and the neighbouring Kanching are the only Konyak villages where the American Baptist Mission has gained a footing. I was to see and hear more of its activity in the land of the Ao—more, in fact, than I liked.

5

HEATHENS AND BAPTISTS

THE bachelors' hall overlooking the Ao village of Chantongai was a deplorable sight. Rain dripped through holes in the roof, and the rooms once used as dormitories by the youths of the village now stood empty and deserted. Like some huge antediluvian monster, the gigantic log-drum lay in the centre, filling more than half of the building. Would its powerful voice ever resound again over the hills? The radiant crowd that dragged it, with solemn songs and joyous cheering, into the village belong to the past! Gone are the merry feasts, when young and old alike assembled in the morung round the great pots of sweet rice-beer. Gone are those days, perhaps never to return.

A bell rang, feebly and 'tinnily', and the sound of singing rose in our ears. Were these Naga voices? It sounded like a hymn or a chapel-chant—or perhaps not quite like either. This singing was entirely different from Naga music, the melodies were not in harmony with Naga expression—as discordant as the ugly tin-roofed chapel amidst the palm thatches of the village houses.

People with sullen faces came out of the chapel; they seemed to me mere shadows of Nagas, or, even worse, caricatures of Europeans. There was the 'pastor', a skinny young man in khaki shorts and a mauve coat. Some of his flock had also adopted shorts as a most important symbol of a good Baptist—it was, no doubt, taken for faith. The rest of the community were content to emphasize their allegiance to the new doctrine by wearing plain dark-blue cloths, while the women wore white blouses, imported from the plains, with their Naga skirts. The Aos' most cherished and valued possessions, the pride of generations, lay unheeded and scattered in the jungle: 'vain trifles' that Christians should not value—ivory armlets, necklaces of boars' tusks, cowrie shells, head-dresses and baldrics, and

artistically woven coloured cloths all discarded, for are they not temptations of the devil?

I asked the 'pastor' why the bachelors' halls were no longer used.

'How could a Christian boy sleep in these inventions of the heathens?' was his answer. 'They are from the olden times; to use them would be against our rules.'

All things belonging to the old times—morungs, dress, ornaments, customs, and feasts—are condemned by the Baptists. In the past the older boys and girls were not allowed to sleep in the houses of their parents, lest it led to incest; the boys were educated in the morungs, learning there the principles of working for the community as a whole and how to take their place in the village life. Now all the ancient restrictions and laws are broken up, the institution of the morung is decaying, and with it the basis of the whole social organization. The morungs were the social centres of the village; the age-groups of the morungs were the natural labour-teams, the rights and obligations of every member of the community were regulated by his rank in the age-group system. But now the old community spirit is lost, and many people fall into the evil ways of selfish individualism. The men's houses stand in ruins, for 'heathens' lived there, and the seasonal feasts are forbidden to the converts because the missionaries pretend that they served the cult of idols.

It is hard to understand why the missionaries objected to the feasts of merit, when a rich man gave from his plenty to entertain the whole community. At these feasts even the poorest received a share in the goods of the rich; you would really think that this was a very Christian doctrine. It is hard to find anything in them that offends the principles of Christianity, but the missionaries have denounced them as heathen customs to be swept away before their religious zeal. The rice of the wealthy no longer serves as food for the poor. Either it is sold, or it rots in the granaries. There was one convert who boasted that his granaries were so full of many years' harvests that part of the rice had become black with age!

What wine is to the Italian and whisky to the Scotchman, rice-beer is to the Naga. It refreshes him on hot days, encourages him to carry the heavy harvest-baskets many hundreds of feet up the steep mountains to the village, loosens his tongue, and makes him merry when, on feast days, he sits with his friends round the fire. But he has to forswear it directly he is baptized. Drinkers of rice-beer, the mission teaches, will burn in hell fire for ever, and the Naga, dazzled by the prestige of the white man, believes, and eschews with reluctance his cherished national drink. But although the spirit is willing, the flesh is often weak, and not all converts find it easy to remain true to their resolution; many drink secretly and with a bad conscience.

The abstention from rice-beer has also an economic disadvantage, for its displacement by tea disturbs the economic balance of the village. Rice-beer is brewed from the superfluous rice, while tea and sugar must be bought in the plains with hard cash; and since there is no market for Naga rice outside the Hills, the Ao finds it difficult to collect the necessary money. The disturbance of a well-balanced economic system often induces the Naga to seek employment in the plains as a coolie, so that he may be able to buy those 'cultural goods' the missionary has taught him to covet.

This craving for a foreign style of living has also the result that a Naga attending a school of the Baptist Mission often leaves his village and goes to Kohima or Mokokchung to find a job as clerk or teacher—posts that his brother-Nagas describe as 'eat-and-sit work'.

Can you blame the Naga if he finds but few ties to bind him to his home village? All those things that brightened the old Naga life—the great feasts, the dancing and singing, the wearing of magnificent ornaments, and, last but not least, the delicious rice-beer that gladdens the heart—have become the forbidden fruits of the garden of Eden. And all that remains of the old culture is hard work on the fields and the unending monotony of the now-eventless years.

However, the mission has won a complete victory in only a few Ao villages. In Chantongia, as in most of the other villages, many refuse to abjure their traditional faith. But

the gaps made by the converts have paralysed the village organization, which, working as so many cogs in a wheel, now lacks the strength to maintain its institutions.

Curiously enough, the men of the old faith show much more tolerance than some fanatics among the converts. You never hear that the 'heathens' have damaged a church or disturbed a service. But unfortunately the Baptists are less tactful, and only too often hurt the feelings of their fellow-villagers by cutting down their sacred trees and desecrating the spirit-stones. And under the pretext that they have nothing to do with the old customs, they sometimes even refuse to collaborate in the purely worldly affairs of the village.

Undoubtedly there must be many Nagas who embrace the Christian faith because they are seriously convinced of its truth. But they are the honourable exceptions; for the majority, the adoption of Christianity, of which they have only a vague comprehension, is little more than the transition from one system of taboos and rites to another. The baptized Naga, adopting the 'customs' of the white man, often believes that by their observance he not only escapes a painful fate after death, but, ceasing to be a real Naga, becomes nearer the admired example of the missionary. He learns to despise his own tribe, and is ashamed of having belonged to a people who have lain so long in the clutches of the devil. Often, however, the adoption of the new doctrine, seeming to command so powerful a magic, has a purely concrete aim. A Naga, having employed all other healing magic in vain, may seek refuge at last in the foreign ritual. But if this too fails, he will probably abandon it, and, shaken in his old beliefs, will waver between the two faiths, unable to decide which is best. Thousands of Nagas are in this position, and bound by neither moral code; many of them are men and women excluded from their Baptist community for the surreptitious drinking of rice-beer.

The people of the old creed appreciate encouragement from outside. It was astonishing how much could be accomplished with a few words. While we were in Chantongia, Mills, deplored the condition of the badly-

decayed morung, mentioned to the people how nice it would be to have the men's house in good repair. A few more words on the value of the old customs so impressed the 'heathens' of the villages that they took a pride in rebuilding the damaged morungs. When I returned to the village in November, I found the men's houses newly thatched, and even decorated with new carvings. I am sure that they were once more in use.

The highly developed wood-carving of the Konyak and Aos is limited to the *décor* of morungs and the houses of those men who have performed feasts of merit. With the disappearance of the morungs and the feasts of merit this art will perish, for the Christian Nagas, inspired by the Mission, despise the 'heathen' art of their forefathers.

The church we saw next day in the village of Akhoia was a low, square, tin-roofed building. The interior resembled an empty schoolroom; the window-panes were of green and red glass, probably the pride of the people of Akhoia, and there were scores of crude colour-prints of scenes from the Old Testament hanging on the walls; the battle of Jericho was probably the most appreciated by these one-time head-hunters. Pictures of Judith with the head of Holofernes and of Salome with the head of John the Baptist were unfortunately lacking; they would have been still more appropriate. But I do not think that it really matters what the pictures represent; coloured pictures mean for the Ao a part of the new doctrine—just as the wood-carvings belong to the old morungs, pictures must hang in churches, and if possible on graves, where they take the place of funeral gifts. The Aos are not bigoted in their choice of pictures, for I once saw a large Marlene Dietrich hung up on a bamboo. It must have come from a magazine that brightened the long, boring evenings of some missionary, and had finally fallen into the hands of his flock. How, after all, should Nagas be able to see the difference between Marlene Dietrich and Potiphar's wife?

There seems to be little reason why the Naga churches should not be decorated with the traditional wood-carvings. Are not numerous Gothic cathedrals covered with fabulous

animals, gargoyles, and demons? In the same manner the highly developed craftsmanship of the Nagas might be employed with advantage in building their houses of worship, and in time new motifs could take the place of hornbills, monkeys, and tigers. A church containing the works of local artists would undoubtedly lie closer to the hearts of the community than one adorned with foreign colour-prints.

Outwardly the villages are not yet very much changed, and have retained their old-style living-houses; and were it not that the people themselves are less colourful, you could hardly tell whether you were in a Christian, or a pagan village. But I am afraid that even this will change, for just as in former times the morung represented the ideal type of house, to-morrow it will be the church; already several native pastors have attempted to give their houses a Western appearance, and undoubtedly others will soon follow.

It is a depressing prospect that the colourless forms of a much-diluted civilization might replace the flourishing indigenous culture, and men and women once happy in their healthy, industrious life should become discontented deracinated creatures, unsuccessfully striving after foreign elements the true essence of which they hardly understand.

The thought of such a change is rendered all the sadder by the fact that the Naga Hills should be one of those districts where such developments are not inevitable. The Government has pursued unceasingly a policy aimed at the preservation of native culture. The officials administer justice, as a rule, according to tribal custom, and great care is taken to avoid imposing anything that could cause a weakening of the old village organization. Even the wearing of Western dress is discouraged, and is strictly forbidden to all Government interpreters. All over the Naga Hills you can see the excellent results of this wise policy; but the missionaries, with an otherwise admirable enthusiasm and the best of intentions, work in direct opposition to the efforts of the Government and eliminate all that the Government does its best to preserve.

Yet how easy it would be to reach a compromise; to

embody the new doctrine in the old life, imbuing existing institutions, the old feasts and ceremonies, with the new spirit! Little—very little—would have to be altered, for the Ao of the old creed prays, too, to a supreme deity, who sends him happiness and misfortune, prosperity and failure, who watches over the doings of men, and rewards or punishes them according to their merit.

Touring with Mills now came to an end, for our ways parted in Mokokchung. Mills went on to Kohima, and I turned back into the Konyak country. It was a strange moment, half of sorrow at leaving Mills and half of excitement at being on my own, when I left Mokokchung in pouring rain with Nlamo, Tsampio, and a few coolies. Before me lay my life with the Nagas.

Several days later we made our way from Chantongia to Merangkong. The sun blazed down from a deep blue sky and the air was filled with the shrill buzzing of the cicadas and the yelling of gibbons from the jungle in the valley—sounding sometimes like the barking of dogs and sometimes almost like human voices. Birds twittered and rioted in the branches. The Burman minivet was the most beautiful; the cock scarlet with black wings, the female lemon-yellow and black. They did not seem to mind our coming, and let us approach within a few steps of them before fluttering unconcernedly to a higher branch.

The village of Merangkong, with its three rows of houses, one on top of the other, presented an entirely regular front; seen at a distance it seemed like an enormous palace hotel looking over the valley. When still a mile or two from the village, we met a group of young men hurrying down the hills, with long bamboos over their shoulders. Questioned, they told us excitedly that the whole village was out to ring a tiger, that the bamboos were to build the fence against which the tiger was to be driven. They pointed, and far below the path we could see crowds of men surrounding a patch of steep, sloping jungle; they were building a stockade on the lowest edge. There was so much noise and clamour that I doubted whether the tiger really was in this piece of jungle, but the Merangkong boys refuted the suggestion,

and assured us that the tracks clearly led to it, but not out of it.

The spectacle of ringing a tiger was not to be missed. I hurried towards the village. I swallowed a few mouthfuls of food and hastily searched my luggage for my small revolver, the only fire-arm I had with me, since I had left my gun at Wakching. I had no illusions as to how much harm my revolver could do to a tiger, but perhaps I had a naïve idea, and not a very altruistic one, that, if the worst came to the worst, I could with a few shots divert the tiger from myself to the men alongside, who would be armed at any rate with shields and spears. After all, it was their tiger.

On my way to the jungle I passed groups of boys indefatigably cutting bamboos and carrying them down to the fence. The piece of jungle to be ringed was surrounded by much activity, and at the lower end, where a small brook trickled through a ravine, a high bamboo stockade had been erected, its funnel-shaped wings running up the slope into the jungle. Young men climbed about on this stockade, strengthening, stiffening, and tying together the individual bamboos; while the mightiest warriors of the village, armed with spears and shields, had ranged themselves behind the two wings. The old men and the boys ringed in the upper part of the jungle; tigers apparently always attack downhill. None of the men had firearms: spears, daos, and high, plaited shields were their only weapons. Some of the older men had given themselves a most terror-inspiring look by wearing head-dresses of bear's skin and various other hunting trophies; cheek-straps set with tiger-claws showed that they had already bagged many a tiger.

When the stockade was ready, I climbed the swaying structure and found myself about eighteen feet above the ground; under my weight the bamboos bent towards the centre of the ring in a most frightening way. The tiger was to be driven against this stockade and speared, or at least I hoped so, practically beneath me, by the men ranged up behind the fence. With one hand I grasped an unsteady bamboo, with the other I gripped my Contax, fitted with a

telescopic lense. I wanted a close-up of the tiger actually being killed by the Aos—or vice versa.

The ringing of the tiger began, and with every minute the tension grew, as the boys and old men came yelling down the slope. Ferociously they cut down the jungle, and we expected any moment to see the tiger fleeing before the noise and the breaking branches towards the stockade. The warriors stiffened and waited, spears poised. Endless minutes passed—but no tiger came. My perch on the bamboo stockade was not exactly comfortable. Gradually it became evident that there was no tiger in this thicket; he must have saved himself long before that empty piece of jungle had been ringed. All that trouble! And all those precious bamboos wasted!

In every civilized country the cheated hunters would have vented their disappointment with loud words of anger, and each would have reproached the other for the failure. It must have been some one's idea, after all, that the tiger, having killed a cow, was licking his chops in that particular piece of jungle, and that someone was therefore responsible for a whole day's lost labour. But it did not occur to the Nagas to reproach each other. They did the only possible thing under such circumstances: they laughed heartily over their own misfortune.

'Isn't it funny, Sahib, that we all went out with spears and shields, and now there is no tiger! Well, to-day he was more clever than we, but another time we will get him, all the same!'

The rice-beer held in readiness to celebrate the killing of a tiger tasted just as good as consolation for an unsuccessful hunt, and after hours on that bamboo stockade in the blazing sun it was pleasant to rest in one of the airy Ao houses. Several men invited me to have a drink with them, and, anxious not to offend, I made at first a sober, and later a slightly tottering, round of the village. It was a little like rushing from one cocktail party to the next. But society life is simple in Merangkong; there is no need to hasten from Mayfair to Kensington and then on to Chelsea, for all your acquaintances live conveniently side by side.

Nowhere will you find better rice-beer than in Merangkong; it is clear and sweet and frothy, like champagne. What a loss to future anthropologists, if the Mission ever gains the upper hand here!

Eventually I visited the house of a famous old man called Sakchimtuba. In his youth he had taken part in many a head-hunting raid, and once he had even crossed the Dikhu and raided Wakching. But when he began to take heads from the neighbouring village of Tamlu, nine Konyak villages formed an alliance against the truculent Merangkong and took a dreadful revenge.

Dusk had come, and the women of the house returned from the fields. They sat down among the men without the slightest shyness. Young Ao girls are pretty creatures, with soft, happy faces, and such light skins that you often see the red blood showing on their cheeks. Tastes differ, however, and when, many months later, I pointed out a particularly lovely Ao girl to the Konyak dobashi Chingai, he remarked that he did not like her; her lips were too pale, he said. Compared to the lips of Konyak women, scarlet from betel, her mouth did indeed appear pale, and I am afraid that as long as lip-sticks do not find their way into the Naga Hills, the Aos will have to forego the favours of their Konyak neighbours. I don't suppose they really mind, for the blackened teeth of the Konyaks must be anything but attractive to girls used to the magnificent whiteness of Ao teeth.

I thanked my hosts for the delicious rice-beer by offering them cigarettes, which were much appreciated even by the ladies; and as it so often happens when alcohol inspires the mind, our conversation turned to supernatural things. I welcomed this turn, for I wanted to clarify a doubt about the deities of the Aos. The old men were delighted to find a white man who took an interest in their beliefs instead of decrying all their old gods as evil spirits.

‘Why should we not pray to Lunkizungba?’ wondered Sakchimtuba. ‘Is not he lord over all? Even our life belongs to him.’

‘But when you invoke him, does he really help you?’ I asked carefully.

‘ Certainly, Sahib; he sees all and helps everybody. If we ask something of him, we receive it. Of course,’ he added with a smile, ‘ we cannot become rich when we want.’

‘ You say that Lunkizungba is the lord over all, but in Chantongia the people told me that they prayed to Lichaba at their sacrifices.’

‘ Oh yes, Lichaba! We, too, give him offerings; he made the earth; but first we always call Lunkizungba, for he was there first. He is like the wind, and he made the sky; also the sun and the moon he made—only afterwards Lichaba made the earth. But it was Lunkizungba who made men; therefore we belong to him.’

‘ Well, then, Lunkizungba is certainly greater than Lichaba; but do you know how he made man?’

‘ No, Sahib; how shall we know that? It was a long time ago, and the people have always said only that it was Lunkizungba who made man.’

‘ And when a man dies, what do you believe happens to him?’

‘ The dead—they go to a distant land. At its entrance Moyotsung keeps guard; he leads the men who have lived a good life into a good village, but thieves and murderers he sends to a bad place. Men are afraid of him, and therefore they try to be good.’

Sakchimtuba became pensive and was silent for a while; then, as with a sudden resolution, he turned again to me and asked almost timidly:—

‘ Sahib, I should like to ask you something. The white men say that Lunkizungba is an evil spirit to whom we should not pray, they say that all who do not believe what they believe are cast into a great fire. I had a wife—she was a good woman and gave me many children, never did she stop working; then she died—it must have been five years ago. Do you think, Sahib, that she, too, was thrown into a fire? Our fathers, who all sacrificed to Lunkizungba, have they all been thrown into the fire?’

‘ No, Sakchimtuba, you must not worry about your wife. I am sure that she went to the same place where all honest

people go. Lunkizungba is the same as the God of the Christians; only the names are different. But Lunkizungba, who knows everything, does not care about the name we give him. He looks after you, and he is looking after your wife in the land of the dead, where you will meet her again.'

6

DEATH IN THE RAINS

I RETURNED to Wakching and settled down to my work among the Konyaks and to the incessant boredom of rain, rain, rain. For days and days it would pour down in dreary sheets, and then, without any warning, the wind would rush up the valley and the rain would rattle down on the roof of my bungalow. It really did rattle, for the roof was of the usual tin. Fortunately the bungalow was solidly built, and it was only during the worst storms that a few drops sometimes squeezed their way through the roof. To live in a tent in this weather would have been hell, and I fully understood why Mills had warned me against touring before the end of September. As long as there is an average rainfall of one inch a day, when you often do not see the sun for three or four days at a time, there is little to be done but stay where you have a solid roof over your head.

The only thing that sometimes got on my nerves was the other inhabitants of the bungalow. I did not mind the small mice gaily running through the rooms, but my feelings towards the rats were much less tolerant. I hated them when they rioted in the roof above my head, and though I felt more or less safe at night under my mosquito net, the knowledge that they were creeping about the room quite close at hand, and might at any moment attack my covers, was infuriating. Yet I should like to warn any one against trying to shoot rats—at least with a revolver. I tried it once; but I only wounded the rat, and the poor devil jumped about the room and, what was worse, jumped about my bed, leaving trails of rat-blood everywhere. I am sure it is always better not even to own a revolver; you are always tempted to use it at the worst possible moment—even on a rat-hunt.

There I sat in the rain, not making nearly as much progress with my work as I had hoped. At the beginning everything had been promising, for then I was still a novelty to the

people, and the gaonburas sacrificed many an hour to answer my first questions. But my Assamese was still meagre, and most conversations had to be carried on with Nlamo as interpreter. This tired the people, and took away much of the pleasure of 'telling stories'; for even talkative Konyaks are naturally bored if every sentence must be translated. And then it was weeding-time, and they were all extremely busy on their fields; it was not always easy to attract enough informants.

Yet in those first weeks I was able to learn quite a lot about the social organization of Wakching, and though much of what I wrote down was incorrect or incomplete, it led me later to more successful questions and to a better understanding of the people.

There were two men who, more than any others, helped me in my work: the gaonburas Chinyang and Yongang. Chinyang had a bony, expressive face and a head of dishevelled grey hair, and in spite of his sixty years his extremely slim body showed hardly a trace of old age. When he climbed a hill in front of me, the muscles playing under the brown skin at every step might have been those of a young man, so beautiful was this well-trained body. His chest was covered with a blue tattoo; punctuated lines ran from the centre of the stomach over the shoulders and half-way down the upper arms, while a necklace was tattooed over the collar-bones. But Chinyang's special pride was the two small human figures between these lines; these 'orders' showed that he had cut off heads with his own hands. He hardly ever wore any ornaments, and only a small apron hung down from his belt. Chinyang had a very happy and well-balanced temperament; he was always friendly, always helpful. As one of the most influential men of the village, he considered it his vocation to initiate me into the customs and the beliefs of the Wakching people, and all that he said was usually sound. Exactly as in any other society, knowledge concerning the laws and customs differs among the Nagas according to the individual. Chinyang was an expert on all questions of tradition, and often, when I talked to several people and could not get a point clear, he would cut into the discussion:—

‘*Ami kobo*,—I will say it . . .’ and then there would follow an intelligent explanation of the point.

Chingyang was proud to belong to the Oukheang morung, the oldest men’s house of Wakching, built in the old times by the founder of the village. As the first morung, it still retains a certain ceremonial precedence over the other four morungs: Thepong, Balang, Bala, and Angban, each forming with the surrounding houses, a social and political entity with a strongly developed ‘patriotism’. I heard many stories, some amusing, some tragic, of how, regardless of the rest of the village, the individual morungs formed alliances with other villages, declaring war and receiving tribute from their own vassals. Yet the morungs are in a certain manner dependent on each other, for they provide each other with wives. No man of the Oukheang, for instance, may flirt with a girl of his own morung or the ‘related’ Thepong morung, but he must look for his girl-friends, and finally for his wife, among the daughters of the three remaining morungs.

Nevertheless there exists between the morungs, in spite of the many kinship ties, a certain rivalry. Some forty years ago such a rivalry led to the expulsion of the Bala people and the burning of their houses; it was only after many years of exile that they were permitted to return. To-day, under the *Pax Britannica*, there is peace and friendship among the morungs, but, for all that, every man is convinced that his own morung is superior to all the others.

It was this strong morung-feeling which led Chinyang to complain to me one morning about the declining birth-rate in the Oukheang; so few boys had been born lately, that he foresaw a considerable shrinking in its population. Chinyang, and many other Nagas, held the prohibition of head-hunting responsible for this and other evils.

‘In the old times we were men, now we are only a crowd of women,’ I often heard him say. ‘When we captured heads, then we had good harvests, then we had many children, and the people were healthy and strong; but now we are no longer allowed to go to war, and many die of illnesses.’

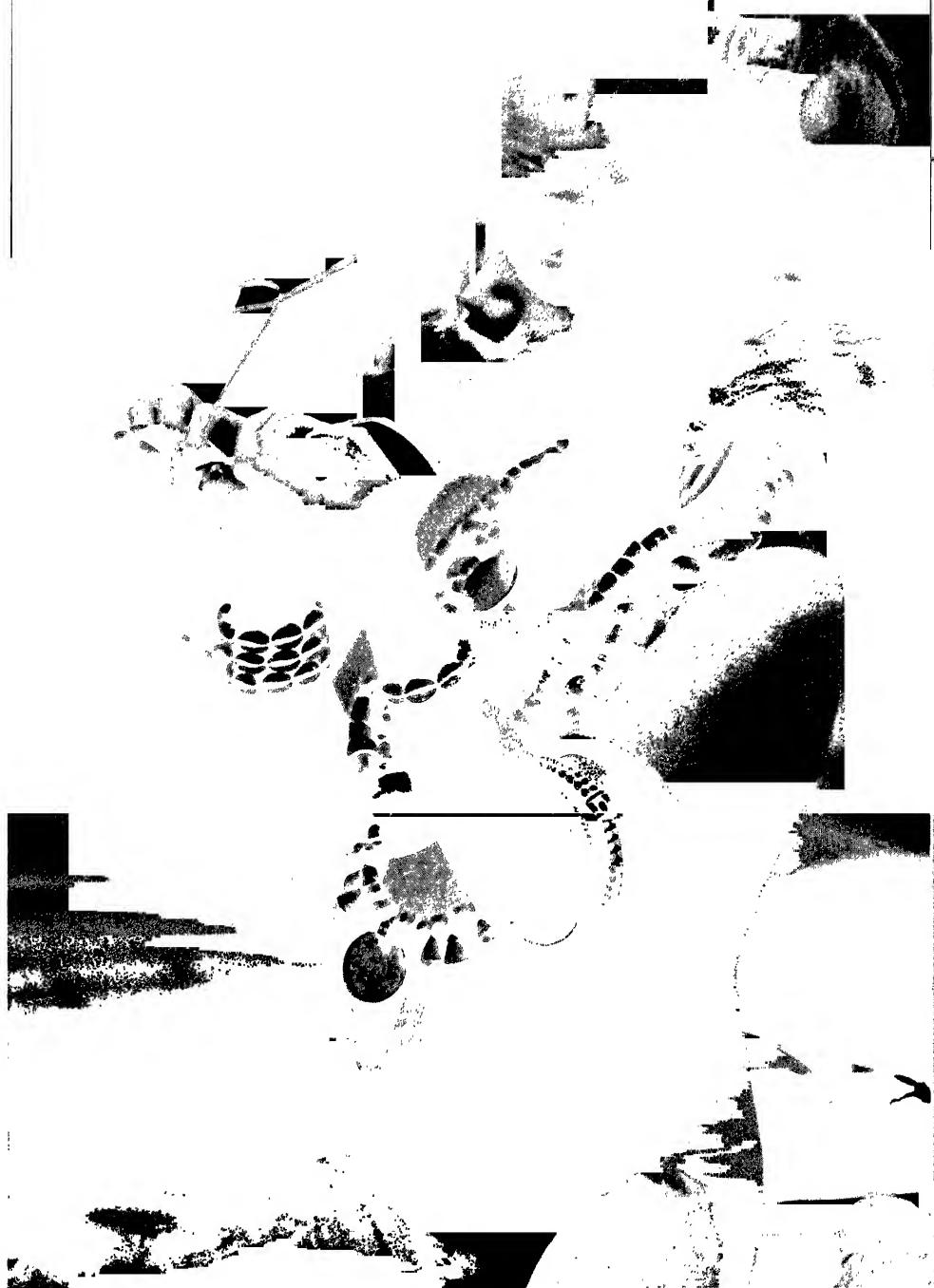
Alas, he was right, this brave old warrior! Since head-

hunting has been forbidden, the intercourse between villages had become safer and more frequent, and disease, so easily carried from one village to another, takes greater toll than any of the old wars.

Chinyang himself had had much misfortune. Three wives had died one after the other, and three of his children. Now he was married for the fourth time, and had a grown-up son and a daughter by the fourth wife. Yet he was fondest of the seven-year-old son of one of his dead daughters. And the boy, although living in the house of his father and belonging to the Balang morung, was always to be seen with his grandfather; and Chinyang, as so often happens with grandparents, spoilt the boy more than any father would spoil his own child. I would offer Chinyang a cigarette, and he, after puffing at it for a few minutes, would hand it to his grandson, sitting silently beside us, and the little boy would smoke it to the end with obvious enjoyment. Whereupon I felt bound to offer the generous old grandfather a second cigarette.

Chinyang, though an opium-smoker, was the soul of honesty, and I would not have hesitated to entrust hundreds of rupees to his care. How little harm his opium did him, I learnt to my discomfiture on many an arduous march. Yongang, his friend and my other most important informant in those first weeks, was also an addict of this vice. But for men such as Chinyang and Yongang, the smoking of opium can hardly be called a vice, for the effects never hindered their work or upset their moral balance. No one drinking his nightly two whisky-and-sodas has the right to object to Chinyang's or Yongang's opium.

Yongang was slightly younger than Chinyang; he had a great sense of humour, and his peculiarly high laugh would often ring out while we were talking. He plumed himself as any cock-sparrow, and probably with reason, over his success with women; I gathered that in his youth he had led rather a gay life. He was three times married and three times divorced before he married his present wife, a pretty, fairly young woman, who seemed to hold her own quite well, despite the definite disadvantage of so many predecessors.



6. Shankok's youngest brother wearing a necklace of yellow 'spirit' stones

These two gaonburas explained to me how Wakching was divided into clans and morung-groups, how the marriage customs and the laws of inheritance worked, the occasions for the feasts and ceremonies, and hundreds of other smaller but equally important things. I had first to learn the outlines of Wakching culture, so that later I could fit my own observations into the pattern.

In these first weeks, when it poured with rain, there was little going on in Wakching besides the weeding of the rice-fields and endless funeral ceremonies; the violent epidemic of dysentery had not yet come to an end, and every day there was at least one death in the village.

I was often wakened during the night by the sinister sound of the great log drums, as the young men announced each death to the neighbours. When I heard the hollow thudding for the first time, I rushed out into the open, regardless of the rain, which soaked me in a few seconds. I could not imagine where the noise came from, nor had I the slightest idea what it could mean. The strange death-rhythm begins with several powerful strokes, and, gradually quickening, dies away in a low rumble.

It was not only the drums of Wakching which boomed through these August nights, but the drums of the neighbouring villages of Chingtang and Wanching. The epidemic had spread like wildfire through the hills, and in Wanching alone fifty adults and thirty children died during the summer months.

On my way to the village one morning, I found a group of boys and girls by the path. They were setting up a monument to the soul of Chinyak, a young man of the Oukheang who had died during the night, not from dysentery, but from some other illness that had lasted several months. Countless times he had sacrificed to the sky-god and to the spirits of the earth, and at last he had even moved from his house, which he felt must be cursed, and settled in the house of one of his clansmen. But all had been in vain, for last night he had died, and now the youths were erecting a bamboo scaffold and putting up a roughly hewn wooden figure for his soul, and the girls were fashioning two caps from large

fresh leaves, and painting them with white chalk; one for the wooden figure and the other for the head of the dead body.

These were the morung friends of Chinyak and young girls of the Balang morung. They did not seem at all shattered by the death, as they talked in their usual light way to each other—these youths, who had lost a companion, and these girls, who had so often sung and joked with Chinyak. Perhaps so many are stricken in their midst that Nagas are more used to death than we, and therefore take it more lightly. I followed the girls up to the village, careful not to tread on the trail of leaves they had strewn on the path, so that the soul of Chinyak, on leaving his body, might find the way to his monument. Chinyang told me that this last act of piety is always performed by the girls of those morungs with which the deceased could have intermarried.

There was much movement in the village: gifts of betel, rice, and vegetables were been carried to the dead body by clansmen and friends. They came to the house either singly or in small groups, and before leaving they dipped a finger into a bamboo mug of water at the door to dispel all infection.

It was ten o'clock then, and the wailing continued the whole morning; so we sat about and waited for the funeral to begin. Owing to the death of their clansman, none of the Oukheang men was allowed to go to the fields—an infuriating taboo when the weeding was pressing, but one which I welcomed, for at last I found plenty of informants in the morung. They were pleased to pass the time in answering my questions and smoking my cigarettes; and many pages of my notebook were filled in the hours of waiting.

Early in the afternoon some old men carried an open bamboo bier into the house, and it was not long before I heard a solemn and curiously urgent voice addressing the dead:—

“Enter the land of the dead; do not be afraid, and if you are asked whose son you are, say: I am Chinyak, son of Yongmek.”

Time after time these same words were repeated; time

after time the dead was enjoined to be of good courage and to remember whose son he was. Suddenly an old man, wearing Chinyak's ceremonial dress and armed with all his weapons, came out of the house. Sitting drowsily in the shelter of the morung, where we had been waiting for hours, we were almost startled by his spectacular appearance. The four old men bearing the bier were completely naked. Was it that they thought the new-fashioned apron would disturb the spirit of the dead? Hardly had the procession formed than it stopped again behind a house—the cursed house of the dead, Chinyang whispered to me. Hoisting the bier to a platform, the old men covered the corpse with a cloth and a few palm-leaves, and then they tied the bundles of food to the platform for the soul of the dead to feed on. It is usual for a chicken to be sacrificed before the platform, but Chinyak had offered so many chickens for his recovery that there were no more in the house, and since neither of his sisters, both married in Tanhai, had foreseen such a dilemma, they had not brought a chicken with them. The gods had to be content with what they had already, so ungraciously, received.

After several minutes of lingering round the platform, during which they did little more than look at the corpse, the mourners dispersed; but the relatives were left with the duty of feeding the corpse at meal-times as long as the head was attached to the body.

In the heat of the summer a corpse decomposes very quickly, and already on the day after the funeral swarms of buzzing flies surrounded the platform. The putrescent liquid of decomposed flesh oozed through the slits in the bier and dripped on to the ground; no words are necessary to describe the suffocating stench round every corpse-platform. To make matters worse, Chinyak's corpse had been disposed of in the middle of the village. One gets accustomed to most things, but not to that revolting smell of disintegrating flesh; even the Konyaks are by no means insensible to the evil smell of rotting corpses. They hold their noses when passing anywhere near a platform, and a small boy once complained to me that the smell of the corpse

in their back garden was so sickening that he could hardly swallow a mouthful of rice in his parents' house.

When I went to the village on the sixth day after the funeral, I was told that the head was to be wrenched from the body; however, I decided that I could dispense with this bit of the ceremony, and was satisfied with hearing a description of how the old women of the dead man's family cleaned the skull and removed the rotting parts of the brain. Chinyak's beautiful white skull, housed in a sandstone urn, was placed by a path on the outskirts of the village, and for three years it will be fed with food and rice-beer on all feast days. The fate of the corpse, or rather the bones, is not of great importance; they gradually fall to the ground, and are either forgotten among the undergrowth that soon covers them, or are dragged out and gnawed by one of the village pigs. The inevitable destructibility of all flesh could scarcely be better demonstrated! It is only small babies who are disposed of in another way: they find airy resting-places among the birds'-nests high up in the branches of strong trees.

My two Lhota boys, Nlamo and Tsampio, were horrified that the pigs should be allowed to gnaw the human bones, and they vowed never again to touch pork in Wakching, 'because the Wakching pigs eat human flesh'. Neither would they eat dog's meat, otherwise highly prized by the Nagas; for they pretended that the missionaries had told them that devils live in dogs. There was apparently no chance of my getting my stuffed dog!

I must admit that I was rather surprised that, after the care with which the skull had been treated, the body should be liable to such disrespect. Chinyang explained that Konyaks do not pay much attention to the bones of the dead, for they are 'empty things'. One part of the soul adheres to the skull, while the other part goes to the land of the dead.

Late that evening we sat on the veranda of my bungalow and looked over where the valley should have been. It was still raining! Would it ever stop? I thought. We had just assisted at the placing of the skull in its sandstone urn in the forest, and we were sitting, four of us, discussing the events

of the funeral. I asked Yongang about the world of the dead—and for once his reply was rather incoherent. But patching my notes together, and later adding things I heard from other people, I gathered that the road of the dead runs from Wakching over the village of Chingtang, across the Dikhu River, touching Chinglong, Chongwe, and Choha, and leads at last under the ground to Yimbu, the land of the dead. There they live, the souls of the dead, a life similar to that of this world; they grow rice, work and celebrate feasts, and they even marry and have children.

But a part of the soul, or rather a part of the magical virtue of a man, adheres to the skull after his death. It took me a long time to understand exactly what this meant, but months later I witnessed a peculiar magical rite which helped me to clear up the question.

The men of the Thepong had been unable to spear the necessary game for the rebuilding ceremony of their morung. Many days had they set out hunting, only to return in the evenings without any luck. The people reflected, and it came to their mind that perhaps the soul of Shouba, the father of Shankok, and once the richest and most important man of the whole village, might not sufficiently support the men of his old morung. So they sacrificed a cock at the skull-urn of Shouba. They brought a fish-net with them, and threw it over the urn, to catch the soul attracted by the offering. Contentedly they carried the net into the morung, certain that the captured soul of the famous Shouba would now communicate its 'virtue' to all the men of the morung. As a matter of fact, they killed a serow next day.

Shankok himself took part in the capture of the soul, and he seemed to have no misgivings that he might thereby inconvenience his father.

Those weeks in August, when dysentery ravaged Wakching and the rain poured down in streams, were not particularly pleasant. Everything was wet to the touch: clothes, bedding, and books were wet, or, if not wet, damp and covered with mould; if I did not wear a pair of boots for two days, squashy mushrooms began to grow inside. The continued rain and the epidemic weighed not only on my

mind, but also on the minds of the Konyaks, for they knew that only with the coming of the dry season could the epidemic stop.

One morning I found Ngamang and Dzeamang on the veranda—two curious and at first rather shy boys of eleven and thirteen. A Naga hardly ever knows exactly how old he is, and the parents lose count of the years as soon as the children pass six or seven summers. Indeed, the number of years is of little importance; important only is the age-group to which the boy belongs—that is, with which boys he entered the morung; for during the whole of his life he forms with them a close unit. I tried to make friends with Ngamang and Dzeamang, for they were merry youngsters, and, surprisingly enough, we got on very well; both of them had a smattering of Assamese—in fact, we all three had a smattering of Assamese. That simplified matters, for I found it much easier to understand these boys than the men who spoke so fluently.

To the two boys the friendship with the 'new Sahib' was the greatest fun. They thought themselves immensely important, explaining all the things in the village and teaching me the Konyak expression for this and for that. They came to my bungalow whenever they managed to sneak away from the work in the fields, and they would go with me, darting here and there, as children will, on my daily walks through the village; until finally their interest faded and the 'new Sahib' was not 'new' any more, but a usual figure in the village. Before this happened, however, I had picked up a great deal from Ngamang and Dzeamang.

What a lot of things they knew! The whole genealogical tables of their families—the ways of addressing various relatives. To find out all those kinship terms alone was difficult enough, but when I checked the boys' work with older men, it was only to discover that they had made hardly a single mistake.

It is surprising what reasonable and independent creatures Naga children are. You can talk with them as you would talk to any grown-up, and though their knowledge is, of course, limited, they do not live in a world of their own,

but take an intelligent interest in the events of the village—perhaps because they share the life of their elders, or perhaps because from their earliest youth they are treated as reasonable and responsible persons. There are few opportunities for coercion or punishments of naughty children. During the whole year I stayed among the Nagas I only once saw a child beaten; and that beating was nothing more than a few smacks an angry grandmother gave to a screaming little boy who refused to leave the fascinating spectacle of house-building and go to his dinner. Parents generally speak to their children in the same quiet and friendly tone they would use to any grown-up—a grumbling father, shouting at and terrorizing his children, would rouse public disapproval at once and lose much of his social prestige. And if it happens that the boys do not want to do exactly as their father wishes, the father only laughs and says: ‘What shall I do with them? Children are like that, after all! ’

That is what happened when Mills sent a Tamlu man as schoolmaster to Wakching to teach reading and writing. At first the gaonburas and the older men were most enthusiastic over the plan. It was explained that, with a knowledge of these new arts, they would not be so easily cheated by the traders of the plains. A house was built, the schoolmaster installed, and the pupils assembled for the teaching to begin. At first the boys thought scribbling on their little black-boards fun, and far more amusing than the tedious work on the fields. But soon the scribbling lost its charm, and they found it still more amusing to play truant, running about in the forest and shooting birds while their parents thought them in ‘school’. The despairing schoolmaster asked my help and complained that he could not hold school without any scholars. This was understandable, and I promised him to do what I could. I talked to the parents of the runaways. They swore a sacred oath that they would send their sons to school. And so they did, but the boys did not come. Once more I tried to assist the poor schoolmaster, and once more I talked seriously to the fathers, lauding the advantages of learning in the most glowing terms.

'Well, we have told the boys they should go to school,' was the answer, 'but if they don't go, what can we do?'

The schoolmaster—incidentally not a mission disciple, but a convinced adherent of the old faith—went back to Tamlu. And the Wakching people are quite happy without a knowledge of reading and writing. Whatever good qualities the Konyaks may possess, they certainly lack a feeling for 'progress'.

FISHING WITH TACTFUL 'SAVAGES'

'SAHIB, Sahib,' I heard a soft voice say in my sleep.

I sat up, slightly angry.

'Sahib, we are going fishing, would you like to come with us?'

Achin, the young brother of my friend Shankok, stood in the door of the bungalow. Had any one else torn me from sleep at such an early hour with that remarkable information, I would probably have given him a very irritated welcome. But only an inhuman barbarian could have said an unfriendly word to Achin. I never saw a more charming child, with his soft dark eyes in a gentle oval face, his melodious voice, and every movement of his slender brown body gracefully lazy. Perfectly unconscious of his charm, he retained even towards me the full simplicity of his fourteen years.

I crept out from under my mosquito net and went to the door to see what was happening. At last a clear morning. The first rays of the sun bathed the land in a sea of light and colour, and clouds of damp mist lay over the valley. I made up my mind at once to join the fishing-party.

There were four of us when we started: Achin, Nlamo, Yongem, and myself. I have not yet introduced Yongem to my reader; he was the newest member of my household. He had the very important task of fetching water, chopping wood, and sparing my other two boys any work that they found too irksome. For this he received the princely pay of ten rupees a month—quite enough to make it worth his while to leave the work on his fields to the rest of his family. Yongem was a man in the early thirties, and I believe his fellow-villagers, though too tactful to mention it, looked upon him as a ne'er-do-well. He was still unmarried, and owned only few of this world's goods; but somehow I rather liked him, and found that he performed the task of fetching

water with masterly skill. Besides, he learnt to speak Assamese tolerably well in the course of a few months, while even in the end I could not speak more than a few phrases of Konyak. That fact could actually prove that his intelligence . . . but I think that that question had better not be gone into, for the Wakching people really did not have any too high an opinion of Yongem's mental capacity.

I once sent him to Borjan on an errand, telling him to fetch my post at the same time, but quite forgetting to give him a note for the post-master. He told the post-master that 'he was the Wakching Sahib's son and wanted the Sahib's letters'. The good post-master-Babu, a Bengali unfamiliar with Naga expressions, thought, of course, that he was dealing with a lunatic, and was careful not to hand over my post. Of course he could not know that Yongem used the word 'son' in the sense of 'a member of my household', in the same way that the Konyaks describe their tributary villages as their 'sons'.

On a fishing expedition Yongem was to carry my gun—a job perfectly suited to his mental capacity. Since the whole of Wakching was streaming in the same direction, we soon found ourselves marching in single file along the narrow path leading to Shiong.

Every one was in excellent spirits, and overjoyed to leave the monotonous work on the fields for one day. The sun ahead of us glittered and sparkled on the million drops covering the grasses and reeds; it was as though a silver rain had fallen over the thicket. So must the world have shone on the first day of Creation in the first rays of the new morning sun. It will always remain the mystery of the tropics that hell can change into paradise with hardly any transition. Unfortunately paradise can just as quickly change into hell! I wanted to burst out singing 'When with my new-cut walking-staff, forth I saunter early . . .', or any other appropriate song, but I knew that the Konyaks would only roar with laughter at my song—a reaction so completely in accord with that of all my friends in Europe that it would have appealed to every advocate of the fundamental similarity of the human mind.

When we arrived at Shiong, the village seemed completely deserted. Nearly every one had already hurried down to the river, and only a few stragglers joined our party. The path now led along a steep slope, and we could see the winding river deep down in the valley beneath us. I had already realized that we would have to drop down more than 3000 feet to the river, but at the sight of that steep precipice I shuddered at the thought of the way home. We continued our way on a narrow path through the ripening rice-fields of Shiong. But the rice-fields soon receded, and a high thicket of reed swallowed the long serpent of our column. I was always surprised anew at the height of those reeds and grasses; they did not look so very tall from a distance, but when you came up to them they towered above you; even an elephant would have been lost among them, for prickly creepers, mixing with the reeds, formed two impenetrable walls on either side of the path. This path was rarely used, but it was tolerably well cleared, and the people before us had trampled down any remaining undergrowth. Now each of the men would casually improve it as he passed, here and there cutting off an overhanging bough or an obstinate liana. Gradually trees mixed with the thicket, and soon we crept through green tunnels and struggled over trees fallen across our path; I was relieved to notice that I was not the only one to stumble over the smooth bamboos hiding maliciously in the grass. Suddenly the path descended so sharply that we were forced to hold on to creepers and bushes to prevent ourselves from slipping, and where the path was particularly difficult to negotiate, the people would queue up as patiently as any theatre queue, and wait their turn.

At last we entered the dusk of the high forest. Here walking was easier, for the undergrowth, cut off from the light, was not so exuberantly developed. Delicate mauve orchids—drawing my thoughts, even in these wilds, to white shoulders and a ball-dress they would suit so well—grew high up from the bark of old trees.

We emerged from the forest into the full sunshine, and knew by the denseness of the reeds that we must be close to

the river. Quite abruptly the narrow path glided into the river, and, without any hesitation, my Naga friends waded into the brown water up to their hips. With my heavy shoes and more extensive dress, I could hardly afford to follow their example. Quickly I constructed, with the help of my belt and a handkerchief, a costume which on the Lido might have caused me several uncomfortable hours at the police-station, but was perfectly correct in the Konyak country. For the Naga boys, too, had only small pieces of cloth hanging down from their belts, while the older men did not even bother with a belt when fishing.

It was a gay and boisterous crowd that was scattered over the narrow sandbank near the opposite shore; some put their nets and fishing-baskets in order, others splashed about in the water. In some places, where the river was narrow, it was fairly deep, and there the boys showed off their skill in swimming. My disguise as a Naga caused obvious astonishment and tactfully controlled hilarity. But the hilarity turned to utter surprise when I began swimming on my back against the current. Swimming on the back is an art unknown to the Konyak, and it evoked general applause. Even the pretty girls, their velvet skins burnished like old bronze, no longer found a Sahib swimming with their boy friends so very awe-inspiring, and that day they posed to my camera for the first time, instead of fleeing before me with little shrieks.

A little way up-stream a weir had been built of bamboo and branches, and near by on the bank the young men, their foreheads beaded with sweat, pounded the poisonous bark of a creeper. Six or eight together, they stood round holes in the ground, lifting their sinewy arms to rhythmical shouts, and the next moment letting the long pounders fall heavily. From time to time the smaller boys, scrambling between their legs, collected the earth, now mixed with the poison, and strewed it over the weir. At last, when a thick layer of poisoned earth covered the weir, the men and boys lined up behind it, and, with much screaming and laughing, splashed so much water over it that the poisoned earth was washed out and mingled with the water of the

7. Walking Men on
their way to the fields



8. A Young Man of
Oting dressing his hair





river. In the end the whole weir was entirely demolished, and the fish, stupefied by the poison, drifted, an easy prey, into the nets and traps of the people farther down-stream. But the catch was meagre, and though the men threw out large round nets again and again, they did not have much luck. Only here and there a silvery fish flashed in the hand of one more favoured by fortune.

Gradually the whole crowd moved down-stream. There, they told me, a less steep path branched off to Wakching, and I had no other choice than to follow them. If you have ever tried to wade at midday in a river under a cloudless tropical sky, you will certainly never repeat the experience; but if you have not, then I warn you never to try. Every step in the muddy water was hazardous. Now I slipped on a slimy stone and fell, with ridiculous and ineffective arm-movements, full length in the water; now I would sink suddenly into a hole, hitting my toes on all sorts of hard things that I could not see. On the bank I could put my feet down just four times on the hot pebbles, before once again having to save myself by plunging my burning soles into the river. I did not even realize that the left bank was outside British India and that unconsciously I had entered unadministered territory. The current was so strong that it was difficult to stand upright, and yet there were only few places where you could swim. Yongem carried my clothes and my shoes in a basket, and the merciless sun, reflected off the water in a dazzling glare, burnt my unprotected skin; I was soon the colour of a well-boiled lobster. My Wakching friends assured me that it was only a mile and a half to the last weir, but that last mile and a half seemed to me more like five. Eventually, when we reached this last weir, everybody left the water to eat their rice and have a short rest.

But I was more dead than alive, and I began to comprehend all those numerous warnings against the tropical sun that are given to every greenhorn. Soon—much too soon for me—we had to start again, if we were to reach the village before dark. The path led through the jungle in that eternal up hill and down dale that drives every European to

despair. The natives do not mind climbing, and rather than make the smallest detour they will climb the steepest hill. After an hour of most exhausting going we were still near the river; not a leaf moved in the damp heat of the forest, and I had to stop more often to regain my breath while black spots danced before my eyes. The path ascended now with greater steadiness, and I soon found the uphill climb harder than the greatest fatigue alone would have justified. Light sunstroke was an easy diagnosis. Some Wakching people coming up behind us realized at once what was the matter with me, and without many words they fell in with our pace. I have never met more perfect tact. None of them had had any luck that day, and now they were hurrying home, hoping at least to reach their village before dusk, but without a shadow of impatience they halted with me every quarter of an hour or so. In vain I tried to persuade them to go ahead—for, after all, I had Yongem to show me the way—but they would not hear of it.

‘No,’ Chinyang assured me, ‘we won’t leave our Sahib alone. When an Ang goes with his men, do they leave him alone? No, may tigers come, may bears come, they remain with him. And you are now our Ang.’

All agreed with him, and I was not a little flattered, even in my exhausted condition, to be awarded the rank of a chief.

If a similar misfortune had befallen me on a tour in Europe, I tremble to think of the impatient faces of my companions, or those few nice words about slacking and lack of stamina, which would have been slung at me. But these ‘savages’ behaved as if a leisurely walk was what they all most wished, and did their best to save me the embarrassment of my miserable condition.

‘Of course, a Sahib cannot walk on our paths,’ Yona comforted me. ‘We Nagas, we are like the monkeys, we climb the mountains—straight up.’

Little Achin, though all his friends had gone ahead, only looked at me with serious, anxious eyes. He did not show the faintest trace of a superiority that most European boys of his age would have felt in a similar situation.

At Chingtang people waited for us by the path with water and bananas. One of my companions had gone ahead to get me these refreshments, and Chinyang suggested I should hire a bier and some young men in Chingtang to carry me up to Wakching. But I did not want to stake my prestige on such an issue, for I felt that if I once allowed myself to be carried, that atmosphere of comradeship, so important to me, would be spoilt.

Chingtang lay on top of a hill, and I really thought we must be well on our way up to Wakching, but we had no sooner left it that we dropped again, and soon most of the height so hardly gained was lost. Now dark storm-clouds precipitated the short dusk. The first lightning flashed, and the remembrance of the terrible downpours of the last months was anything but cheering. But my friends paid little attention to the weather; nothing was to make me believe that we were in a hurry. Now they proposed we should rest again, and brought small green tangerines from the forest; they were dreadfully sour but refreshing.

Night fell and every moment flashes of lightning illuminated the country for whole seconds at a time. Slowly, very slowly, we moved up a steep, open slope. I had fever, and I knew I would not be able to manage the remaining two thousand feet without a good rest. But before I could mention the fact, Chinyang suggested that we should make tea in one of the near-by field huts, and the others accepted the idea without debate. We went down to a hut through the fields, where large taro-leaves stood between the rice-plants. And there I fell down, like one dead, on a mat, while my friends fetched water from a brook and made a fire. Nagas usually carry small bags of tea with them, and they took out a handful and let the leaves boil in the water for some minutes; after a few mouthfuls of the bitter beverage my spirits were somewhat revived. Again they found excuses for me, and Yona told me that exactly the same thing had happened to him one day when, coming home from the plains, he got fever and 'felt like dead'—nobody could help such a thing!

At last we could start again. The thunderstorm had

luckily passed, and two torches, made during the rest from split bamboos, brightly lit the path. From the height of the ridge glowing points moved downwards. They were the torches of men coming to meet us, for our absence had already caused anxiety in the village.

After yet another hour we arrived at the bungalow. I stumbled into bed with tired and aching limbs, but even in my exhaustion I felt that the experience had been worth while. The Wakching people appeared to me in a new light. Nowhere could I have found more consideration and helpfulness, and, above all, more tact. Several of my companions were old-time head-hunters, but any deduction of hardness or cruelty of mind would be quite wrong. Big books are written about the psychology of 'primitive peoples', and the presupposition is usually that their mentality is essentially different from ours. Only very seldom do you hear the real unsensational truth, that 'primitive man' thinks and feels, in all fundamentally human things, exactly as we think and feel.

8

THE HARVEST

'No eggs, Sah'b', were the sombre words Tsampio chose for greeting, as he brought me my breakfast one morning. I think he rather enjoyed informing me, with furrowed forehead and sorrowful voice, of the various deficiencies of our larder. The lack of vegetables was certainly unpleasant, but no eggs—that was a much more serious obstacle in the way of Tsampio's culinary efforts.

Yet I could not feel completely innocent of the sudden dearth of chickens, and consequently of eggs. Day after day we had bought and eaten two or three chickens, and the village was unaccustomed to such demands. Not that I had such an enormous appetite, but a Wakching chicken is thinner and bonier than a partridge in spring, and is scarcely enough even for one meal; indeed, the Wakching chickens are famous all over the hills for their smallness, and even the Aos like to describe a miserably thin person as a 'Wakching chicken'.

However this may be, the birth-rate among the chickens of Wakching was not high enough to sustain the heavy toll that the presence of a Sahib and his incessant demands imposed on them—and the many sacrifices for the souls of the innumerable victims of the recent dysentery epidemic had accelerated the decimation of their ranks. Later on, in the winter, my Wakching friends sent for chickens and eggs to all the neighbouring villages, and even across the border into the tribal area. It was only unfortunate that the Konyak idea as to the freshness of eggs did not quite coincide with mine; and very understandably so, for they use them only as offerings to the gods, who are certainly not particular as to the flavour, while my last resort was scrambled eggs—'kuni rumble tumble', as Tsampio called them—with the largest possible dose of pepper.

But during these days of September my friends in Wakching

had no time to provide me with eggs, for the harvest had begun, and all their thoughts were entirely wrapped up in this most important of tasks.

It is a great temptation to represent the Nagas as a fierce and warlike people, throwing light only on head-hunting, human sacrifice, and other exciting customs, for the unusual is always the greatest stimulant to our imagination. But if we were to yield to this temptation, the picture would have little in common with reality. The Naga is first and foremost an agriculturist. Nine-tenths of his thoughts and his life are devoted to his fields, and the things that mean most to him are the state of the crops, the weather at harvest-time, and the number of rice-baskets in his granaries. Those who see him only in his village can neither really know him, nor understand the complicated social organization that attains its full expression in the daily work of the fields; and they will find it hard to realize the enormous amount of work accomplished by men, women, and children, at certain times of the year.

It may well be that the Konyak's system of agriculture, with the continual shifting of fields, is the oldest in the world. It is much more primitive than that of the Angamis, for the Konyaks know nothing of complicated terraces or artificial irrigation, and therefore expend much more time and energy in raising a smaller crop than the tribes to the south.

From early autumn, when the elders of the Wakching council decide on a particular block of land for the next year's cultivation, the entire population devote their energies to the fields. This decision is generally only a matter of form, since a definite cycle has long been established, whereby each section of the land is brought under cultivation once in every fourteen years.

Unlike the land of a European peasant, the property of a Konyak is not grouped together in one place, but is scattered irregularly over the whole of the village land; and thus it happens that whether the land to be cultivated that year lies to the east of Wakching or to the west, north, or south, a man is sure to own, or to be able to hire, enough for his own needs.

The conception of primitive man haphazardly clearing and planting a piece of jungle is not in any way applicable to the Konyaks; each piece of land, each tree, and each clump of bamboos possess a jealous owner, and trespassing is energetically prosecuted.

The clearing of the land is the work of the individual families, the old men and women cutting down the under-growth with their daos, and the young men felling the trees. Only a few are left standing, so that the jungle may regenerate quickly, once the period of cultivation is over. Then, after the cleared land has been left to dry for several weeks, it is burnt, and in January and February you can see smoke and lines of fire on all the slopes, slowly eating their way up through the thicket. Often on windless days the smoke lies idly over the land in long wreaths, and the sun is tinted dull red in a leaden sky. The Konyak knows nothing of manuring, and the ashes from the burning jungle provide a much-needed fertilizer.

Before the sowing can begin, the charred pieces of wood must be collected and the ground smoothed and cleaned; huts spring up in the fields, and here the workers go to seek protection against the burning sun and the heaviest of the summer showers. Digging over the soil is dull work, and one which the Konyak would not dream of undertaking alone. The idea of the solitary plougher would not appeal to the Naga, for he knows how much easier and how much more amusing it is to work together, and the young people, at any rate, join in gangs and cultivate each other's fields in rotation. Even the small boys and girls are organized in groups, and all over the fields you can hear the songs and shouts with which they accompany the work.

The Konyak performs no rites or ceremonies till the sowing begins. He realizes that the cutting of the jungle and the proper clearing of the fields depend only on the efficiency of man. Why should he trouble the gods? But when the seed must be entrusted to the earth, where hundreds of dangers may threaten the crops, the Konyak turns to the Deity, and asks his protection with offerings and prayers.

The first sowing is a ceremonial sowing, a solemn act performed by a descendant of the village-founder on behalf of the whole village. He sacrifices a chicken on one of his fields and speaks to the sky-god Gawang:—

‘Let there be many blossoms this year; be gracious, O Gawang. Give us rice, give us millet, O Gawang.’

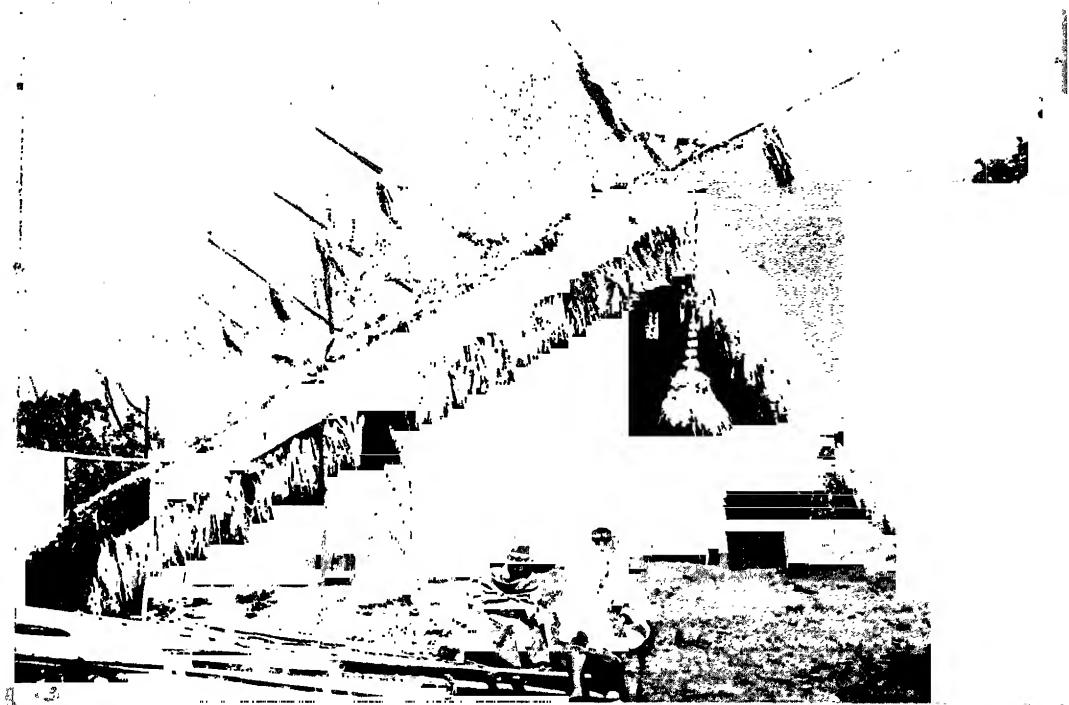
Then he throws out the rice, murmuring: ‘May my rice sprout first. Shut the beaks of the birds, bind the mouths of the rats and mice. May the crops prosper.’

From now on you can see men and women hurrying to the fields, their baskets full of seed-rice, and the first blossoming branches of a peach-like tree sticking in the grain.

Men sowing rice and millet make a lovely picture, and I shall never forget the first time I saw the young sower, a red woven bag slung over his shoulder, striding up and down a sloping field with long, free steps, and scattering the rice with large sweeps of the arm; behind him a row of stooping women covered the seed almost before it rested on the earth.

Taro, on the other hand, a tubercular fruit found as far away as the islands of the South Sea, but little cultivated in India, is planted by the women. They dig small holes in the ground with their daos, in which to lay the tubers, and then cover them over with earth. It is the women’s task also to carry home the taro harvest, for to carry taro is considered a shame for a man. Yet it occupies an important place in the diet of the Konyaks, and this prominence points to the primitiveness of their culture. There are even several villages to the east of Wakching—for instance, Chen—where no rice, but taro and a little millet, is grown; and it may be that rice, so much valued, is a comparatively recent introduction, and that taro was the original staple crop of the Konyaks; it is possible, too, that in the old times the work in the fields was much more the affair of the women.

When the luscious green of the young rice covers the undulating slopes, there begins a time when the Konyak knows little leisure. Side by side with the sprouting rice, weeds grow, and unless they are frequently removed, only a scanty harvest can be expected. Shankok was always



9. The Bala Morung, one of the men's houses of Wakching

10. Sowing the Rice at Wakching





complaining of the difficulties of keeping pace with the weeds on his ten fields, and even though he often hired one or two gangs, feeding them during the day and paying them a little cash, the obstinate weeds always seemed to get the better of him. Once or twice, driven to desperation, he even hired boys from a morung of Chingtang. This keeping pace with the weeds means weeks and months of endless standing in the rice-fields. The women wear large rain-shields made from palm-leaves, but the men work unconcernedly with either rain or sun on their naked bent backs.

Yet how could you find even weeding boring, when you are working side by side with your 'beloved'? A wise Konyak custom allows the most tedious work to be performed by girls and boys together. The boys of a gang invite their girl friends to go with them to the fields, and the next day they help in return on the fields of the girls' fathers. These working-gangs are always composed of the intermarrying morungs—the girls are the potential wives of the boys, and more often than not their actual mistresses. Small wonder that much laughing and joking banishes boredom, and many of the Wakching love-stories begin in the rice-fields.

At the end of the weeding there are feasts in the field-houses, and these are the greatest fun. The boys of each gang invite the girls who have worked with them, and take a pride in making their beautiful companions so drunk that they must carry them home to the village.

One evening, as I was coming home with Shankok through the ripening fields, we heard peals of laughter coming from one of the field-houses. Shankok whispered to me, it must be an 'end-of-the-weeding feast'. Sure enough, the next moment out tottered a girl, who subsided almost at once on the ground. Boys tumbled screaming out of the hut, and with roars of laughter tried to drag the fallen girl to her feet, but they were not very successful, for she only stayed weakly where she was, and seemed incapable of making any effort herself. The six other girls, who one after the other appeared in the doorway, did not seem to me any more sober than the first—the pretty Meniu of

Shankok's clan, by now hanging helplessly round the neck of a Bala boy. He made short work of it, and taking the half-unconscious girl laughingly on his back, walked triumphantly ahead, while the other tottering girls followed, very much with the support of their friends. The light of the deep yellow moon creeping over the mountains shone full on this rollicking bacchanal, and the evening stillness was rent by shrill, drunken laughter.

'Look, Sahib,' whispered Shankok; 'the boy there with Meniu on his back is Henyong. Until a few weeks ago he went with Liphung, the daughter of Yona, every night; but she has married, and now he runs after Meniu. The poor girl, she has had too much rice-beer to-night. Only look; now she is being sick—oh! look, all that beer on Henyong's shoulder. He will be proud of that!'

Funnily enough, the boys actually consider it an honour if finally they succeed in making their 'beloved' sick from too much rice-beer; it proves that the hosts have not been stingy with their entertainment.

I followed at a distance up the hill, curious to see the reactions of the parents of these beauties. What would they think of this lavish hospitality? But there were none of those floods of reproaches with which many European mothers would have received their daughters, or those who brought them home dead drunk; they seemed only too pleased that the girls had had an enjoyable evening!

'You should see, Sahib,' remarked Shankok, smiling, 'when the girls entertain the boys. Then it is even more merry. They, too, must often carry their boy friends home. Oh yes, they are strong enough—a girl can quite well carry a boy a short distance; of course, when it is far, then two girls must lend a hand to bring a drunken boy to the top of the mountain.'

Even to-day I am sorry that I never saw such a grotesque spectacle, but Shankok's word is reliable, and I have confidence in the Wakching girls and their capacity sometimes to reverse the rôles.

The end of the weeding is a joyous time, and is celebrated all over the village. Wealthy men give small parties for

their daughters and those girls who worked with them in the fields, to which their boy friends of the other morung group are invited. Although I had not done any work, I was also invited to one of these parties.

All morning the house of the host was busy with preparations; the girls indefatigably pounding rice and the men mixing the meat of newly-slaughtered pig with millet and wrapping it firmly in strong leaves, so that it could be boiled in earthen pots and served in little packets.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when I arrived at the party. I was apparently the first guest, for only the people of the house sat round the hearth in the living-room, and there was that lull that always surrounds the too-early guest. A thick brown liquid steamed in a large pot over the fire. It was a horrible beverage—a kind of warm 'beer' that the Konyaks prepare from the fermented rice left over from the brewing of the clear rice-beer. I never succeeded in swallowing more than a few drops.

One after the other the girls, friends of the daughter of the house, trickled in. I asked one of the sons of the house their names. Four were called Meniu, he said, two Shuidzing, and two Mendzing. What an incredible lack of imagination! and one that makes it almost impossible ever to disentangle the complicated kinship system; with this uniformity of names, how are you to know whether a man talks of his sister Meniu, or his uncle's wife Meniu, or the daughter of his mother's sister?

The girls chatted eagerly to each other, and after a considerable time had elapsed we heard the voices of the boy-guests outside. They stood in the light of small oil lamps, quite unconcerned at the rain pattering on their large rain-shields. They stood almost half an hour before the door, singing a song of almost unbelievable monotony, while the girls just sat rather shyly on the long pounding-table in the great hall.

When at last the boys finished their song, they came into the house, and without paying much attention to their pretty friends, ensconced themselves round the fire. The girls and the people of the house emptied the earthen pots,

heaping meat and rice on large wooden dishes; four boys sat round each dish, and without many words began swallowing huge quantities of food. When they had finished, they did not in the least bother to entertain their companions with brilliant after-dinner conversation, but devoted their whole attention to chewing the 'pan' leaves and betel nuts that the girls offered them in neat little parcels.

They seemed quite content sitting before the fire, and it was a long time before they decided to take a little air on the veranda. Here they squatted down on mats with the girls, who mostly sat with their backs against the wall. Conversation did not seem to be one of the girls' strong points either; they were very silent, laughing only now and then when the boys made some isolated joke. But they chewed betel all the more energetically, lifting the mat every few moments to spit on the floor. Soon the boys began to sing their song again in the same monotonous voices, but this time each in turn started a sort of recitative, all the other voices joining in after a few notes.

Feeling that perhaps it was my presence that weighed on the atmosphere, I left the party at about eleven. It had stopped raining, and even at that late hour a few night-revellers sat on the small platforms before their houses.

I heard next day that the party had lasted the whole night, and the young people had not gone to bed at all; because—as Shankok told me—the girls were so very young! At other parties of this kind the couples slip away to the granaries quite early in the evening, but these girls, being little more than fifteen, hesitated over their first steps in the courts of love.

These small private parties that are given for the weeders are crowned by the great village feast at the beginning of the harvest, the Ouniebu. The Konyaks deem it far safer to propitiate the gods, collecting new strength by a few days of thorough eating and drinking, before they begin to reap, than to wait for the feasting until after the harvest.

On the first day after full-moon the gaonburas surprised me with the information that the Ouniebu had already begun.

‘We made a mistake in counting the days,’ they explained, ‘for how could we see the moon while it was raining night and day? But yesterday we caught a glimpse, and saw that the moon was full. Quickly we called together the old men and decided to start the Ouniebu to-day.’

Had I known of their trouble I could have helped them with my calendar, and told them that the moon would be full on the 2nd of September; as it was, I had not realized on which day the Ouniebu should begin. Now, however, the situation was saved, for that morning Yongmek, of the founder’s clan, had cut a few ears of each of the seven kinds of rice and hung them up in his house, and so the harvest could begin.

When I went to the village the calm of the morning was broken by the squeaking and grunting of pigs tied up to be slaughtered. The men of the Thepong morung alone killed eighteen pigs, and one mihan bought for thirty rupees by Shankok and some of his friends from Chi.

The killing of pigs is not a pleasant sight. It is performed, not by the owner, but by the oldest man of his clan, who receives the heart and the kidneys as a reward. Two men hold the miserable squealing animal, as a pointed bamboo spike is driven into its breast. Small comfort to the luckless pig that the killer calms its last moments with the words: ‘We do not send you on a bad path, we send you on a good path; do not be angry with us’.

The use of any metal instrument for slaughtering pigs is strictly taboo. The bamboo spike is an ancient instrument that survives, as in so many other cultures when iron has only been introduced later, for ritual use. The custom of slaughtering pigs during the harvest festival undoubtedly dates from a time, perhaps not so far distant, when the Nagas made all their instruments of bamboo and stone.

Mihan, buffalo, and cattle may be killed with any weapon —spear or dao. For they are comparatively recent additions to Konyak culture, and therefore are not subject to the old ritual. Some Konyaks are even afraid to eat the meat of mihan or cattle, and Shankok, though feeling he

owed it to his prestige to present a mithan to his relatives and friends, refrained from eating the meat himself.

The exchange of gifts between the families related through marriage forms the centre of the Ouniebu, as of so many other Konyak feasts. A complicated system regulates the beneficiaries and the donors, and every man tries to surpass his partner in generosity. The unmarried girls prepare millet-breads to give to their lovers, friends, and working-companions of the other morung group.

It was the night of the second feast day, when the boys went to receive these breads, and the palm roofs shimmered like silver in the bright moonlight that flooded the village. The girls had assembled in their dormitories, and the boys moved in groups, singing from one to another. Everywhere they were given millet-breads, and everywhere they thanked the girls with their monotonous songs.

In the old days the feast of the Ouniebu was gay with dancing, for the young warriors did their best to procure a head for the harvest, and its capture was celebrated with dancing and singing in full ceremonial dress. But now head-hunting is forbidden, and the harvest festival takes a more sombre form.

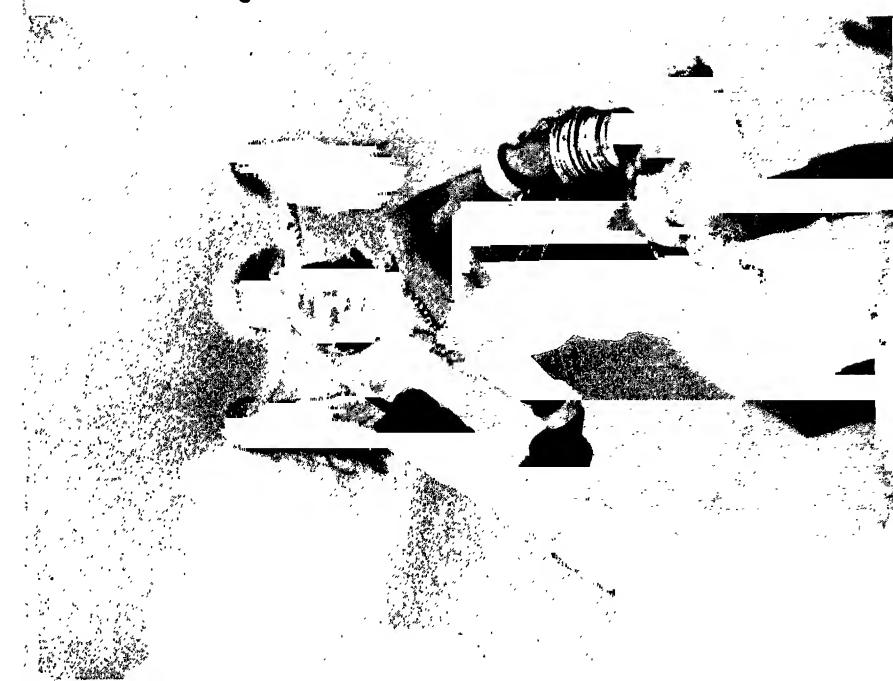
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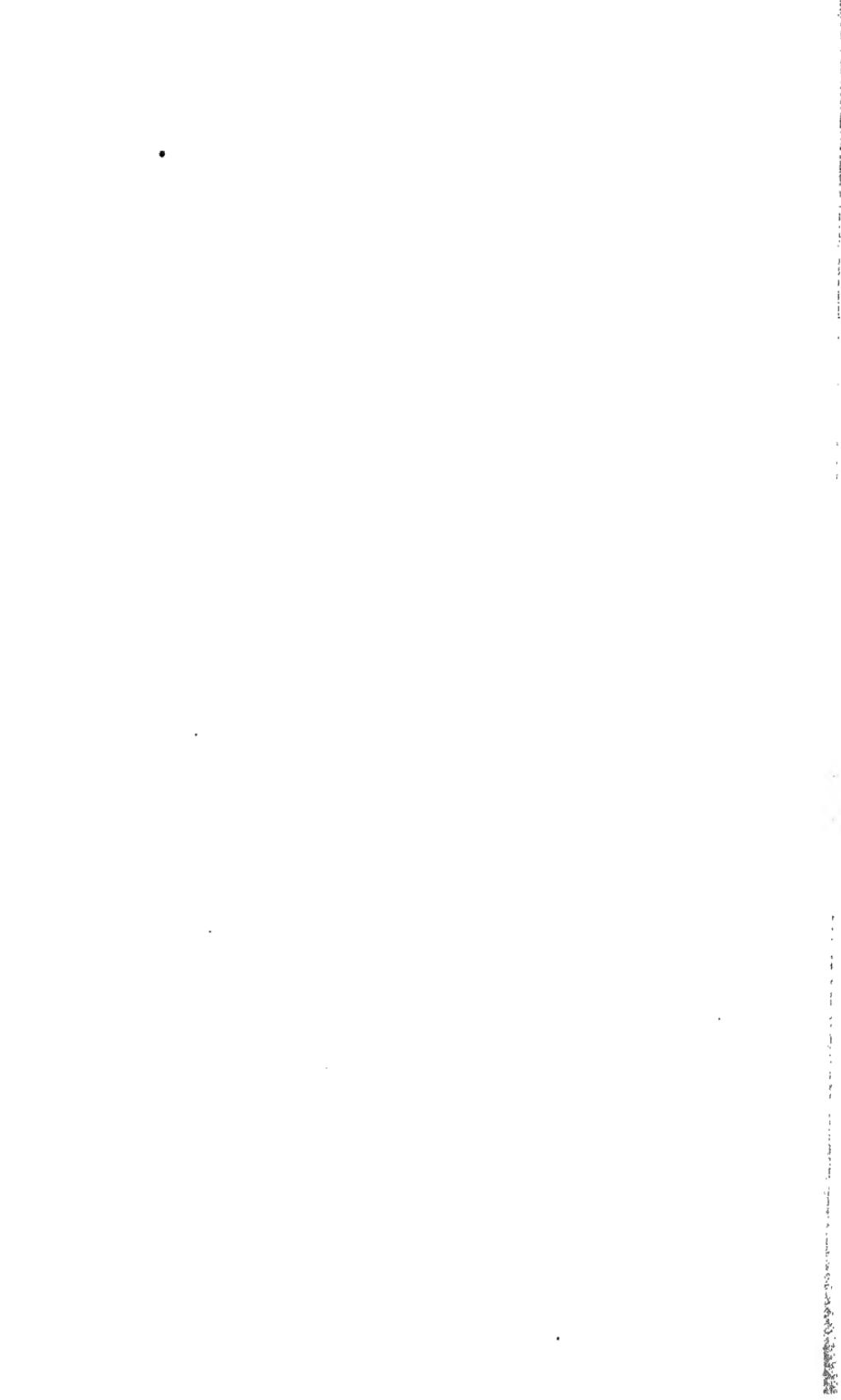
The reaping was in full swing as I went one morning with Dzeamang, a pleasant, talkative young man of the Bala morung, to his fields; they lay an hour's walk from Wakching, not far from the village of Shiong. In the field-house we found Dzeamang's brother and his wife just boiling tea—nine out of the ten times you see Konyaks resting they are boiling tea! It is strictly taboo to enter another man's field-house during the harvest; apparently, however, I was above such taboos, for they invited me in and offered me tea. We sat talking a while, and then Dzeamang's brother asked me whether I would not like to help cut rice. As he accompanied his words with a toothed reaping-knife, I could hardly refuse, and soon I stood between the two brothers, cutting one bundle of rice after the other, and piling them in small heaps. It was tiring work; for it needed a lot of mental care to raise the rain-bent stalks



11. Dzeamang in full
ceremonial dress
throwing a spear

12. A Konyak Boy
stringing his cross-bow





before cutting, and at the same time to avoid the fleshy leaves of the taro growing in the same field; and a great deal of physical energy to stoop continually and to work the knife with the unaccustomed movement. It was not long before my back ached and my hands were sore from little blisters. How I admired these people, standing from morning to evening with bent backs on the fields, diligently and unceasingly reaping rice! But I admired them even more on the steep path home—after a long day's work. Here they were carrying baskets heavy with grain, not once, but sometimes twice up to the village.

The majority of the fields are cultivated by individual families, though sometimes with the help of hired labour. Yet some fields are cultivated by groups, for, otherwise, from where would the morung get the rice for its feasts? Every man must contribute to the work on his morung's field, and on certain days you can see all the members of the morung leaving the village together instead of in the usual twos and threes; the boys and the girls to work and the old men to sit and look on.

One day, the boys of the Balang morung called to me as they passed on the path below my bungalow: they were going to reap their morung field, they shouted. The Sahib should come and watch the work. I finished writing some notes, and then made my way to the Balang morung-field. Long before I reached the field I heard the cries of the boys; both sides of the path leading to the field-house were literally covered, on the one side with girls' rain-hats and on the other with long rows of boys' spears stuck shaft foremost into the earth—a glance at this 'cloakroom', and it was easy to enumerate the workers that day. Long lines of girls worked on the lower slope, reaping their sheaves and throwing them behind. When a whole patch had been cut they would gather the sheaves together and carry them on bowed shoulders up to the field-house. There the boys threshed out the rice with their feet, throwing the empty straw through the opening at the back of the house, where two boys stood on top of the stack, continually pitching it on to make room for the next bundle. Higher and higher

grew the stack of straw, and the dust-clouds blowing round the field-house thickened. Now and then the threshers would give a peculiar quick, swelling laugh, ending almost in a shout, and this would be taken up and echoed by the groups working on the fields. How different were these fierce cascades of cries from the rhythmical work-songs of the Angamis!

Once more the shyness of the girls defeated me; they would run away with shrieks and squeaks at the sight of my Contax, or duck deeper among the ears, and long before I could gain their confidence huge mountains of cloud towered up in the sky and covered the sun for the rest of the day.

A hearth had been built in front of the field-house, and here the old men sat comfortably under an awning, taking pleasure in mugs of tea or rice-beer. They had worked and fought for their morung in their youth, and now they sat and watched the exertions of the younger generation. All these strong boys and girls filling the air with laughter assured them that they need have no anxiety for the future of their morung.

9

THE GIRLS' CLUB OF PUNKHUNG

ALL through the rains I had comforted myself with the thought that towards the end of September the weather would improve and in October I could begin touring through the villages lying north-east of Wakching. So when at last we had several clear days I decided to start, and sent messengers to the nearest villages announcing my visit. Chingai, the dobashi of Oting, was also informed that he should meet me in Punkhung four days after full moon. We spent a whole day in dividing up the tent, the camp-bed, cooking utensils, clothes, and provisions into nine coolie-loads, and then, just as the baskets stood packed and ready, the heavens opened as though the whole world must once more be soaked before the respite of the dry season. However, rain or no rain, I could not postpone my tour; the Wakching boys who were to carry my luggage to Tanhai already squatted on the veranda of my bungalow and would not have appreciated being sent home on account of a little rain. When you hire Konyaks as coolies, they come in twos, or even in threes for each load, carrying it alternately. Of course they must also share the wages, but they do not mind that. Better little money and a comfortable life is the motto of the Konyak. The Angami prefers carrying a full load and receiving the whole wage for himself.

Thus it was that, for the nine loads, eighteen boys had appeared and squatted near their baskets since early morning. Though the Konyak dislikes early rising, there is one thing that drives him to leave his bed at dawn: the hope of picking the lightest load. For it is a case of first come, first served, the first comer, tying his carrying-band to the load he has selected, secures his claim.

It was pouring with rain when we started from Wakching. Our coolies went ahead, next came Tsampio with his

umbrella and wine-red wool cap, while Nlamo and I followed at a distance. The path to Tanhai had not been cleared since July, and we had to wade shoulder high in wet grass, often hardly able to discern the track. Even the greatest enthusiast, delighting to praise the pleasures of walking in rain through autumn woods or summer fields, could have found little charm in such a march through the dripping jungle and wet grass, on a path full of small rivulets. Nlamo was my only comfort, for he thought it horrible too, and was not one of those unbearably optimistic companions who go on assuring you with forced gaiety that 'it could be worse'. For my part, I did not think it could be much worse.

Not a stitch of my clothing was dry when eventually we reached Tanhai, and I asked the people of one of the morungs to light a fire so that we could warm and dry ourselves a little. I took this opportunity to talk to the gaonburas, filling several pages of my notebook with information on the social organization and various customs of Tanhai. What strange fatality followed me? Wherever and whenever I arrived there was bound to be a funeral. No sooner had we reached Tanhai than we heard the now-familiar wailing and a procession with the corpse of a boy passed in front of the morung. Here in Tanhai, as in Wakching, the people of one of the morungs are disposed of on bamboo biers, while those of the other morung, as well as the people of Ang Clan, are placed in open wooden coffins.

Slightly drier, we continued our march on a much better path, running straight along the ridge. The loads had been taken over by the Tanhai people, and the Wakching boys had gone home.

Quite near Punkhung, the Ang and a gaonbura waited for me on the path. They had erected a shelter of palm-leaves, and entertained us with rice-beer and bananas. Together we climbed the steps, cut in the rock, leading up to the village, and entered it near the upper morung that stands in a splendid strategical position, isolated on a little hill. More stone steps led down to the houses of the village.

It was a pleasant surprise to find that the good people of Punkhung had built me a hut of bamboo and palm-leaves on an open space near the chief's house; it would have been hell to pitch my tent on the sodden ground. But this excellent hut had a floor of plaited bamboo raised several inches, and I could rely on the roof of palm-leaves.

The chief sent me a goat, two chickens, and some bananas as gifts of welcome, thus solving the food-problem for the moment. The Punkhung people were friendly, but full of curiosity, and half of the village congregated round my hut to see the unpacking, watching every movement with burning interest. My electric torch caused gaping surprise, and every cigarette was received with great enthusiasm. A lover of solitude would long for the peace of a big city after a few days in such a jungle village, for to be surrounded by spectators from morning to night gets on the nerves of the most phlegmatic of people. I could hardly throw the boys out of the hut they had built me, and apart from that, I felt that the curiosity of the white man must be even more infuriating to them than their curiosity was to me. What would we think if a foreign visitor were to take out his notebook after drinking a cup of tea and begin writing down the names of our parents and the descent of our grandmothers, and finally inquire into our customary behaviour when our wives committed adultery? Sometimes I admired the Konyaks for their patience in answering all my questions, which must often have seemed quite senseless to them, and for the endless trouble they took in dictating texts in their complicated tonal language, which—to their great amusement—I never succeeded in pronouncing correctly.

That evening the dobashi Chingai arrived in Punkhung, and I was glad to see him, for here, where none of the men understood much Assamese, his services were indispensable.

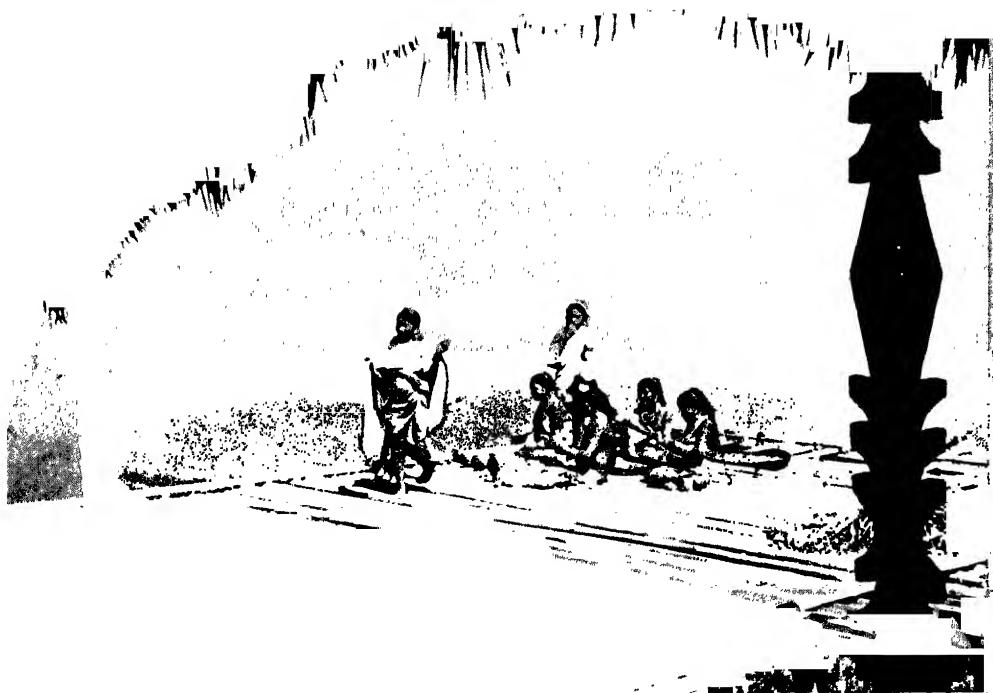
I heard the rain dripping on my palm roof the whole night, and the next morning there was little improvement in the weather. I would have liked to take many photographs in Punkhung, for it varies in many ways from Wakching. The style of the men's houses is entirely differ-

ent; they lack the great open porches, and the communal room lies at the back. Even in their importance as social centres they are overshadowed by the chief's house, where all the councils of the village take place.

Though the chief of Punkhung is not a 'great Ang', but only belongs to the 'small Ang clan', his house is a stately building about 100 feet long, and his wealth appears to be considerable. In one of the many dark rooms there is a great wooden bench carved with hornbills' heads. It is his throne, which only he and his son may use, and in the failing light of the afternoon I found him there covered with his cloth, peacefully sleeping.

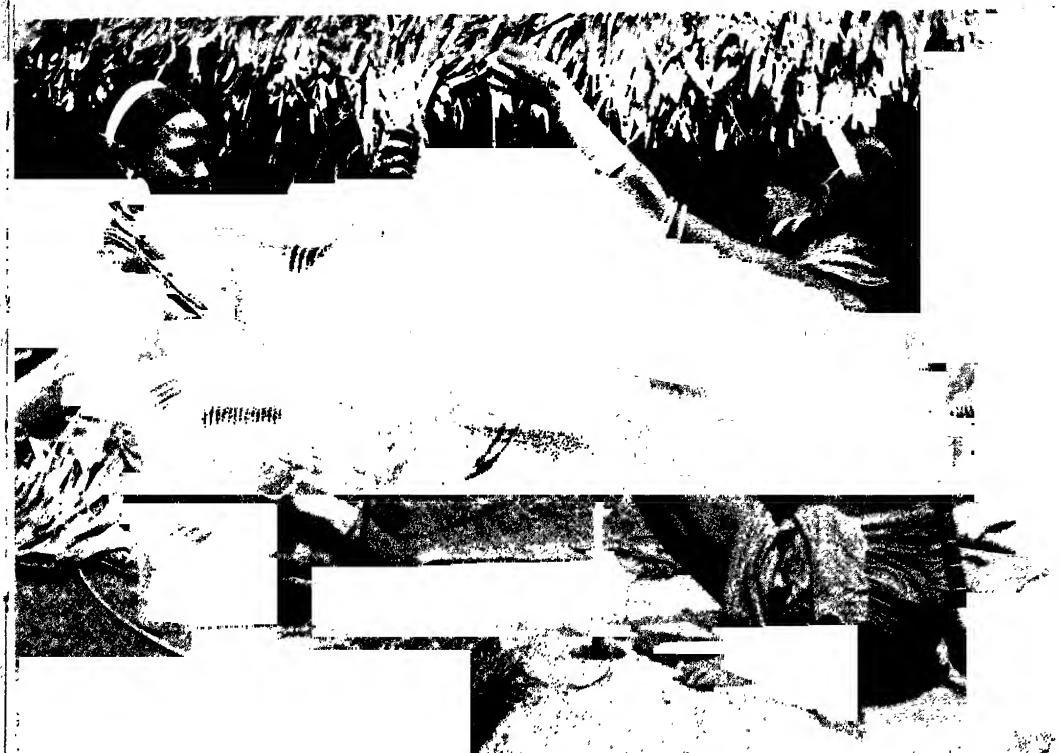
It was difficult to write in this dark room, and we went to the open hall at the back, where the light was better and where most of the life of the chief's family goes on. The old wife of the Ang was busy spinning a peculiar material from the bark of a low shrub (*Urticaceae Debregeasia velutina*). This bark is first shredded and then spun, and after many boilings the thread is eventually so soft that it can be used for weaving cloth. This bark textile probably belongs to an older cultural stratum than the material woven from home-grown cotton which is found in the villages of the Wakching group.

Towards evening the girls with their baskets full of vegetables returned from the fields, and came and sat down near the fire. Among them was the chief's daughter, covered with jewels, and wearing only a quite small skirt. By chance we spoke of the marriage customs, and I unwarily inquired the bride price of a chief's daughter. Hardly had Chingai translated my question, than the whole circle burst into unrestrained laughter, and the giggling girls cast glances at the daughter of the Ang, who covered her face with her hands in embarrassment. Someone remarked that the white Sahib might want to marry the daughter of the house and was inquiring after the price. I knew that the Konyaks love to spin out such a joke, shaking with laughter for a long time, so I described at great length the spears, daos, bronze gongs, cloths, and other valuables that I had already collected: a great treasure, that I would



13. Women on the platform of the Chief's house of Punkhung

14. Ngapnun (left) and another Longkhai Girl spinning bark



willingly hand over to the chief for his daughter. She was actually a very pretty girl, though the custom of blackening the teeth gives rather a grim expression to the smile of all these beauties. Chingai confided to me later that the girl had a liaison with a married man and that, much to the anger of her father, she was expecting a child. Now all the hopes of the old Ang of marrying his daughter to a chief's son from another village were shattered, and it was difficult to find a fairly honourable way out of this embarrassing situation, since the girl's lover, not being of chiefly rank, could have only one wife. However, when I came back to Punkhung five months later, I heard that the lover, in compliance with the chief's wishes, had divorced his wife and was going to marry the chief's daughter; not a very distinguished fate, certainly, for the daughter of an Ang, even though he were only of 'small Ang clan'.

If I had unconsciously touched on a sore point, my joke had so amused the other girls that they invited me to their club, or so I should like to call the separate room in the chief's house where the girls of the Ang morung spend their nights. Here they receive the visits of the boys from other morungs, and no objection is raised if these visits last far into the early hours of the morning.

When I turned up that evening with Chingai, the girls were still alone. In the light of the flickering fire they sat on their broad sleeping-benches round the room, and passed the time with their beloved singing. There was no cause to doubt their good spirits, but their songs sounded sad and monotonous, rather like dirges at the grave of a dearest friend, and even when the boys came in one by one, and sat down, each next to his girl, the songs did not become any merrier. There was much silvery, high-pitched laughter in the pauses between the songs, and the jokes flying to and fro were no longer ambiguous. Nevertheless the actual behaviour of the young people was unimpeachable, and the couples did not dream of flirting openly; they would have plenty of time for that when the red embers of the fire burnt out and the shadows on the walls had faded into the darkness. There was a great romp, with much laughing and scream-

ing, when one of the boys left his place for a moment and another girl jokingly slipped in beside his sweetheart.

My cigarettes once more found great favour, and one of the boys sold me a plaited ribbon, the kind that the girls give their boy friends to tie together their pan-leaves. Probably the girl was not present, or perhaps she no longer enjoyed his favours; for another boy, more gallant, refused to part with a similar band for double the price.

It was midnight when I got up to go, but the girls begged me to stay; apparently they were not burning to be left alone with their boy friends. I assured them I would gladly stay the whole night, but which of them would spend it with me? Obviously I was joking, but I had apparently found the right tone of conversation for the Punkhung Ladies' Club, and we parted with great hilarity.

The young people certainly laughed a long time, and no doubt made remarks on the white man who went to sleep quite alone in his hut. How could they know that far into the night, and much longer than I liked, I sat at my table recording my remarks about them in my diary?

But the Konyaks are born night-birds, and they only begin really to wake up at midnight. This quality can be very annoying when you would like a little peace in the camp after a tiring march. I remember nights when the people immediately next to my hut or tent debated in the liveliest tones until three or four in the morning. The following day, of course, it was often difficult to find the necessary carriers in time, and to shake my dobashi awake. Before nine o'clock in the morning, Konyaks are as good as incapable of any mental effort, and the few times I got up early and wanted to make some notes I soon gave it up, in face of the continual yawning and stretching of my informants. But they would often come and want to tell me endless stories until late into the night, and then it was I who had the greatest difficulty in keeping my eyes open. The Konyaks even go to work on the fields quite late. Between nine and ten in the morning is Tai-dzim—'Assembling-together-time'—the hour when the men and the boys come to the morungs and sit about on the open platforms, chewing

betel and discussing the events of the day. Only about ten o'clock—at the time of 'all go', as it is called—do they start off, and the sun often stands high in the sky before the men begin their day's work.

Why exert yourself when it isn't necessary? the Konyak thinks; and apparently he is right not to sour his life with too much work. To him the hours in the girls' club are not wasted time, and enjoyment is worth more than any material gain.

10

PARADISE IN THE JUNGLE

DENSE virgin forest covered the low saddle of the mountain between Punkhung and Oting, the home village of Chingai, where I had decided to spend the next few days. After months in the high mountains, I revelled in the hot, crowded forest, with its hundreds of voices, which remained ever invisible and ever mysterious. I was conscious of life teaming round me, and yet, when I stayed my step and peered among the branches, no leaf moved, and only the isolated shafts of sunlight slanting through the foliage painted an emerald mosaic on the green of the forest floor.

The village of Oting, in the shade of fan-palms and high clumps of bamboos, lay like some dream from the childhood of man. The crest of the long ridge, only 2200 feet high, is covered with a tangle of vegetation, which even at a glance is very different from the scanty forest round Wakching. It grows close up to the houses that stand singly and seem almost crushed by the riot of untamed jungle. The branches of the orange trees bent under the weight of fruit, and yellow pomelas, as on some pictured tree of knowledge, shone from among dark leaves. The pulp inside the thick skin of these fruits is pink and reminds you of grapefruit; but they are rather bitter, and I never learnt to like them. I preferred the tangerines, which the people brought me in great baskets; they did not look so good, for their skin was still bright green, but the fruit inside was deliciously golden. After the unvarying monotony of bananas they were a welcome change. It was fresh fruit that I missed most in Wakching.

The people of Oting, acting on Chingai's suggestion, had also built me a nice hut, and I was pleased; it would be good to stay many days in this friendly village. I do not think that any other Naga village can boast of so lovely a position as Oting, and the people seemed to have the easy

amiability of most sun-kissed lands. To my great surprise, even the girls were not afraid of my camera, and smiled gaily with black mouths whenever I wanted to take their photographs. The great difference between the individual villages in their attitude to my Contax was always a puzzle. While there were villages where the photographing of women was either altogether impossible or a matter for diplomatic action, when dobashis and gaonburas must intervene, there were others where the girls seemed to think it fun to be taken, and would continue with their normal activities as though nothing unusual occurred. Perhaps the women are shyest in the villages lying closest to Borjan or to the plains; evidently on their frequent visits to the markets of Assam they have already had unpleasant encounters with strangers.

But the girls of Oting are an unembarrassed and gay crowd, and if you tried to explain that it would be more pleasing to the gods if they permanently covered their brown bodies with a cloth, they would laugh incredulously. Until their fifteenth or sixteenth year they go about as God created them. Only later on do they adopt a small skirt, hardly a hand's-breadth wide; a symbol that they now belong to the adults. '*Naturalia non sunt turpia*'—Natural things are never disgraceful—the Konyak thinks; and this refreshing simplicity finds expression in a most useful custom, which no doubt saves many quarrels and hard words. I noticed that some girls wore leaden, and some brass, rings in their ears. That, explained Chingai, shows whether the parents consider their daughter old enough to take a lover, for only then may she change the rings of her childhood for brass; until then, she must be content with lead. So the boys always know where they stand, and there is no playing at hide and seek—no risk of the reproaches of infuriated parents. The provident father even builds a bamboo bed for his daughter in a separate room of his house, where from the day of the changing of the ear-rings she may receive her lover.

The girls are not sparing with their favours, nor do they reserve them only for the boys of their own village, for they often 'walk out' with boys from the neighbourhood.

Their girlhood is full of amorous adventures, though, once married, they seem to settle down and are happy enough; but to be paid for their love is unimaginable.

Has nothing power over the girls of Oting? Is there no magic that can influence these beauties? I asked Chingai one day, suggesting that since there are sacrifices and magical formulas to drive away disease, to achieve the fertility of the fields, and secure luck in hunting, there must surely be magic for winning favours of girls. But the thought seemed ridiculous to Chingai.

‘No, Sahib,’ he remarked laughingly, ‘there is no such magic, for in love everything depends on a girl’s fancy. If a man were to sacrifice three hundred, four hundred buffaloes, it would not help, if the girl did not like him.’ And then he once more laughed loudly at the thought of beguiling a girl with magic.

Life in Oting seems still easier than in the villages higher up in the mountains. There is a great deal of land at the disposal of the village, and even in times of bad harvest bananas ripening throughout the year never allow the feeling of hunger to arise among the villagers. There is no wracking of brains over the problems of everyday life; clothes and food are always at hand, and in a land where bamboos and palms grow abundantly, there is no difficulty in finding the other necessities of life. In the course of a few hours a house is durably thatched with a roof of palm-leaves that offers equal protection against the cloud-bursts of the rains and the strongest rays of the summer sun. Bamboos are excellent building material; they can be cut from the jungle in any required strength, all ready for use. Thick, strong stems provide the posts; split and plaited into strong mats, they are admirably suited for house-walls and floor-coverings, while narrow cane strips form ligatures that, taking the place of nails and clamping-irons, bind the posts together. A great house can be built in two or three days, for all clansmen and friends lend a hand, and are paid on completion by a lavish entertainment of much food and rice-beer.

It is certainly the freedom from all those daily worries, so



15. The Konyak Village of Wanching

16. Boys of Oting spinning tops





overshadowing the life of the more civilized world, that is responsible for the gay, carefree temperament of the Konyak. Perhaps it is also responsible for the absence in their villages of any serious crime. Talking to the old men sitting in front of the morung one evening, I turned the conversation in the direction of punishment and crime; for, after all, I thought, there must be black sheep even in Oting. The old men admitted that cases of theft do occasionally occur, but they said it hardly ever happened that a man stole rice from his neighbours' granary. He can so easily borrow what he requires, they explained, the next year he has only to repay the same amount; if he borrows two baskets, he returns two baskets. It seems that the Oting people are more generous than my friends of Wakching, who make a profit of fifty per cent. on such a transaction by demanding three baskets in return for the two.

'But tell me,' I continued, 'what would you do if two men of your village quarrelled and one killed the other?'

There was a thoughtful silence for a moment. None of the old men knew what to answer.

'Sahib, I have seen many harvests fill my granaries; these palm-trees did not yet stand when I was young, but never have my eyes seen such madness. I do not know what would happen, for our fathers' words do not tell of such things.'

'All right; but may it not happen that someone sets fire to his neighbour's house? What is done with him?'

'What should we do with him, if he has bad luck and the fire escapes his hand? We just help to build a new house.'

The others nodded in agreement; yes, all would help, that was clear to them; that needed no long deliberation. It never occurred to their minds that the fire might have been intentional. Yes, they would just help to build a new house!

'Of course,' remarked the old man after several minutes, 'it does happen that two men come to blows. After all, we have women in the village. Do you see Dhakai over there, plaiting a basket on his platform? Well, once he went to Wangla, but on the way down to the bridge he noticed that

he had forgotten his bag with betel nuts. So he quickly puffed up the hill again and entered his house, and there he found the rascal Photun with his wife. Sahib, you should have heard the noise when he chased Photun through the whole village. Two fat pigs the boy had to pay the infuriated husband. However,' he added with a sly smile, 'few women are so stupid; is the jungle not great enough?' And he pointed with a vague gesture to the palm-forest encircling the village, and then added with pretended indignation: 'Why must the boys play with the wives of other men? Are there not enough girls with brass earrings?'

Happy Oting people, whose only quarrels concern the faithlessness of women, who cannot imagine a murder or a thirst for revenge disturbing the peace of their village. Are they angels forgotten in this far-off paradise? They are certainly nothing of the kind, for their blood boils quickly and they have a certain naïve cruelty that manifests itself in the custom of head-hunting. But side by side with this cruelty you find an amazing tactfulness. Rarely is anything mentioned before a man that he might find embarrassing. 'His mind would hurt' is the literal translation of the stereotyped explanation for such consideration. All Nagas are careful not to hurt the feelings of others, and often, when I worked with several informants, one of them would come to me afterwards and tell me that one of his friends had made a mistake, but he had not wanted to contradict him in his presence, for 'his mind would have hurt'.

11

SACRED CHIEFS

WATCHING the people of Oting at work in the village and on the fields, listening to their talks in the morung and on the verandas of the houses, you would scarcely think that there existed among these naked brown people a difference of class, a difference between the high and the low, between aristocrats or Angs and commoners or Ben people.

Their daily life does not seem in any way different, the aristocrats do not possess better houses or richer furniture, and except for the village chief himself, the people of Ang Clan are in no way outwardly conspicuous. The running of the village, however, lies mainly in their hands, the adult men of Ang Clan forming the council of the chief, which decides all quarrels and settles disputes over field-boundaries and the like. Yet there is no animosity or opposition between the two classes of Oting—at least, I did not discover any. The aristocrats and commoners are in no way secluded, but, on the contrary, mingle freely together, and are natural marriage partners. Those aristocrats who do not marry Ang girls from other villages must seek wives among the daughters of the commoners in Oting; likewise a man of Ben Clan may not marry a girl of his own class, but must woo a girl of Ang Clan. The children, though naturally of mixed blood, belong to the father's clan.

The position of the so-called 'Great Angs' is quite different. These powerful village chiefs, such as the Great Ang of Mon and the Great Ang of Chi, have the sacred blood of the chiefs, pure and undiluted, in their veins. There can be no more exclusive community than that of the 'Great Ang Clan', for as the kings of Egypt kept the royal blood pure by marrying their own sisters, so the Great Angs take their wives from their own Great Ang Clan, and it is only the children of such a union that acquire the father's rank.

Few of the small vassal chiefs can boast of a spotless

genealogy, and even Dzaknang, the proud Ang of Oting, is not of the highest rank, though his family is nevertheless considered equal to most of the chiefly houses of the smaller neighbouring villages. His mother was the sister of the old Ang of Punkhung, and he married that uncle's eldest daughter, who gave him two daughters and a son.

Dzaknang invited me to his house; he said he wanted to introduce me to his family. I found his two daughters nice, but rather plumper than the other girls of the village; evidently they worked less than the daughters of ordinary men. Though they were not particularly young, they both wore lead rings in their ears. They were a warning to the boys, for the rings clearly said, 'all trespassers will be prosecuted'. But it was not enough for the Ang to forbid his daughters to flirt with the commoners of the village; now he was faced with the necessity of finding them husbands, if possible of corresponding rank, from the chiefs' houses of the neighbouring villages. This was a pressing and not a very simple task, for at the moment there seemed to be a dearth in the possible husbands for such girls. The houses of Wangla and Lunglam were out of the question; they were too nearly related to the Ang of Oting. It was a pity, the Ang said, that the houses of Punkhung and Hungphoi had no sons of a suitable age, for many of the Angs of Oting had taken their wives from these villages in the past. When Tanhai was mentioned, the old Ang only shook his head; he looked down on the Ang of Tanhai. He was not his social equal, he said. The Oting girls, on the other hand, were not of high enough rank for the sons of the Great Angs of Chi, Sheangha, Hangnyu, and other powerful villages. To my question why they could not marry half-brothers of the Great Angs, belonging also to the Small Ang Clan, Chingai remarked that it is better to be the wife of a chief in a small village than the less respected member of a great chief's house.

The situation was further complicated by the refusal of the girls to marry into villages more than one day's journey from Oting. How could they visit their parents and their old friends at the annual feasts? 'We would never hear in time of the illness or the death of our parents', the girls

complained. No, all by themselves into a far-off village they would not go.

Indeed, when high birth restricts the circle of possible mates, it is difficult even for Konyak girls to get married in time. Their rank obliges them to refrain from the amorous adventures with which their less noble friends fill the years before marriage, and the life of a nun is certainly no enviable fate amidst the frivolity of the Oting girls. Perhaps discontent born of a dull life was the reason why both the Ang's daughters seemed to me serious and a little morose, or perhaps it was only natural shyness before a stranger of whose rank they were uncertain.

Chingai, himself of Ang Clan, confided to me that not only the father but all the men of Oting's Ang Clan worried over the fate of the chief's daughters. However, after months of discussion, a compromise was found, and when I came back to Oting in the spring, I heard that the Ang had decided to allow his younger daughter to marry a Ben boy of Oting, and had arranged to marry off the elder girl to the son of the chief of Hungphoi. There was a definite objection to the fiancé, however; he was, in fact, only ten years old. I am afraid I am unable to say whether the unfortunate Ang's daughter is supposed to remain chaste until her husband is grown-up, or whether she may seek consolation with other boys; perhaps one of the cousins of the young husband acts as proxy until he is old enough to take up his marital duties himself.

It is a remarkably close tie that unites the Ang families of the Konyaks even across the frontiers of their own villages, and one which was concretely demonstrated to me while I was still in Oting. One evening I sat with Chingai and the old men before one of the morungs, as it was growing dark; the sun had set behind the dark-violet mountains, and the high palms and the broad, massive banana leaves stood outlined against a sky flooded with orange, when suddenly a band of richly decorated warriors emerged out of the dusk. They were an embassy from the Great Ang of Mon, the over-lord of Oting, and they came to pay his respects to the recently deceased Ang of the Dingdon Morung. The

leader was a very young boy of the Great Ang Clan, with a magnificent head-dress of hornbill feathers, and all the other warriors were rather young and apparently deeply convinced of the importance of their mission.

They rested for a short while, and then proceeded to the open space in front of the house of the late Morung Ang. Here, in the failing light of dusk, they enacted a dramatic representation of all the phases of a head-hunting raid. With cat-like movements, one of the warriors crept over the open place, peering to left and to right, and then, seeming to sight his quarry in the distance, cautiously retreated, fetched another warrior, and pointed out the discovered enemy. Now, signing to their companions to remain in the background, both the warriors crept forward. After breathless moments, considering themselves near enough to the enemy, they raised their daos and fell on their victim with furious yells. A short fight ensued with the imaginary enemy, ending with one triumphant warrior's cutting off the head of his victim. Now all the other warriors rushed on to what must have been innumerable enemies, suggesting by the frantic movements of their daos a wholesale massacre. This slaughter continued for a few minutes, and when not a single enemy could conceivably remain, they raised their spears to the sky, shouting battle-cries that rang out in wild, ghastly shrieks. Then they paced in a circle round the open place, and one man recited over and over again: 'The Small Ang of the Dingdon Morung is dead, the Great Ang of Mon feels therefore great sorrow'.

They were hardly human roars that rang through the night, and for the first time in the Naga Hills a cold hand gripped my spine. Would these young warriors from the unadministered territory remember the mockery of the fight, or, overcome by the enthusiasm of the dance, might they not seek a real victim? I was a stranger in a foreign land—no doubt a most suitable victim!

But the warriors hardly noticed me sitting with Chingai on the porch; they streamed past me into the morung with the Oting men, and soon two fires flared up, and the great hall, so often empty, seethed with people. The guests lined

up on either side of the great wooden body of the log drum, bringing the heavy carved drum-strikers down thuddingly on the thick wood, taking the time from an expert drum-beater, and not, as I had imagined, from the young Ang. The rhythm changed several times: at first it was not very marked, all the warriors hitting with their full force. The resultant booming was terrific, and almost hurt my ears. But soon the leader, a drum-stick in either hand, while the rest of the players held sticks only in the right hand, began drumming two strong consecutive beats, the others following with quick little strokes. Then once again the rhythm changed; this time it was interspersed with short complete pauses, that ended by the leader's small whoop and the crashing of all the strikers on the drum.

I noticed that the Oting men, busily hurrying too and fro, bringing wood for the fires, crouched when they passed the drum-playing Ang; even though he was quite a young boy, the respect for the sacred Ang blood apparently forced them to this submissive attitude. After a time, when the players, their sweat-covered backs glistening in the light of the fire, put down their strikers, the young Ang played the death rhythm alone for several minutes, thus once more announcing the death of the Morung Ang.

The next morning the guests exercised their right to spear one pig within the area of the Dingdon Morung. The animal was not held and slaughtered in the ordinary sacrificial manner, but was chased, as on a hunt, and killed by hurling spears. The men of Mon fastened the pig to a bamboo, singed it over an open fire, cut it up, and, boiling the meat, ate it on the spot.

The honour shown to a deceased Morung Ang on such visits is dearly paid for, and I think that the young men consider the eating of the pigs of the mourners the main part of these ceremonial visits of condolence.

Late one night, sitting writing in my tent, I heard voices outside, and I stepped out into the darkness to see what was the matter. The small light of my oil lamp shone upon two figures, prostrating themselves full length at my feet. Unused to such Oriental homage, I was rather bewildered at

first, and at a loss what I should do with the men who were brushing the ground with their huge feather plumes face down in the dark. However, a little persuasion finally induced them to stand up and tell me what they wanted ; they were from Joboka, a village beyond the frontier, and had come to welcome me, bringing with them two chickens as 'salaams'. As soon as I heard they were from Joboka, I began to understand. The day before, Chingai had told me of the ambush the Joboka men had laid for a group of Yannyu people returning from a trading expedition in the plains, when they captured the large number of nineteen heads. The Nagas themselves do not consider the ambushing of trading expeditions as legitimate game, and such exploits are not looked on with favour by the officials of the adjoining districts. So the Joboka men, hearing that a white Sahib was in Oting, had no doubt seized the opportunity to find out how the land lay, and whether they would be called to account for their immoderate greed. Since I had neither any desire nor any authority to interfere in this affair, but only displayed a great interest in the newly acquired neck tattoo and their other head-hunting insignia, they left me greatly satisfied. It was too late at night to call on one of their friends in the village, and so they asked whether they could spend the night in my camp ; I had only my three boys with me, and I told them they could sleep in the small shelter standing beside my hut if they liked. I must admit that it never occurred to me that it might be inadvisable to establish two such recent head-hunters in my camp outside the village. However, they justified my unconcern and proved camp-companions with excellent manners. Next morning, as we sat all together before my hut, chewing betel, one of them suddenly jumped up and with desperate gestures seemed to ask me something. At first I could not understand, but later I discovered he only wanted to know where he might spit out his betel !

One of the Joboka men wore a neatly plaited gauntlet of red cane, instead of the usual loose cane rings. I wanted to buy it, but he explained that he could not sell the gauntlet, for his pregnant wife had plaited it, and in case of a difficult

delivery the gauntlet would have to be cut into pieces. They are curious, these people. How sincerely they adhere to the letter of their old traditions and customs! It is a general belief among the Nagas that during a difficult delivery all baskets in the house must be cut open and all knots loosened. The idea seems to be that their loosening facilitates in some magical way the loosening of the child from the mother's womb.

Our start from Oting was beset with difficulties. Tsampio had been suffering for several days from troubles of only too obvious a character. He had gone on leave some time before we had begun touring, and perhaps it was in Kohima that he had picked up his malady from a bazaar beauty; now he was suffering acutely, and I seemed to have no other choice but to hire several coolies and have him carried on a bier to Wakching; ultimately he reached Kohima, where he found medical attention. Tsampio's departure left me without a cook, and though Nlamo succeeded quite well in preparing the few things we got in these villages, he found it difficult to do Tsampio's work as well as his own and still find time to assist me as interpreter. Perhaps this produced the necessary stimulus, for I quickly overcame the final difficulties in talking and understanding Assamese, and it was not long before I became quite accustomed to working without an interpreter.

The way to Wangla, the village on the opposite hill, passed through a broad valley, probably cleared for cultivation that year for the first time for generations. Gigantic trees had defied the clearing-fires, and now they provided a most pleasant shade as we walked through the reaped rice-fields. In the bottom of the valley there was a cool, fresh stream, and here we rested at midday and enjoyed a delicious swim in the dark-green water.

Wangla and Hungphoi both received us well, and I stayed in each of these villages several days. They were full of interest, for even though they lay so close together—scarcely a few hours' march apart—there were many differences in the traditions and the customs of the villagers. Nearly every village still has its collection of captured heads stored away on the many shelves of its morungs, and once a year, at the Spring Festival, they are fed with rice-beer.

In front of one of the morungs in Hungphoi I noticed a tall, slender stone; on inquiry, it turned out to be the stone erected by those Hungphoi youths who had 'carried' the head of a Chen woman to Mon. Such stones can only be set up at the bringing in of a head; the two youthful heroes had evidently played a different rôle from the one they had described in Tanhai, and there can be little doubt that they brought at least a small piece of the head back to Hungphoi.

While I was eating my breakfast, on the morning after our arrival in Hungphoi, Chingai came running into my hut. There was a young wife in the village being tatooed; would the Sahib like to watch? The girls are generally tattooed on their legs and arms at the age of eight or nine, but the full tattoo, consisting of two broad bands above the knees, is only completed when a girl becomes pregnant and wants to move into her husband's house; the completion of the tattoo marks the wife's entrance into the man's clan. When I arrived, I found the girl stretched out on the floor of the veranda of her parents' house, amidst a crowd of laughing and chatting friends. Five women held her down as she writhed with pain, while a woman of Ang Clan, alone expert in this art, performed the artistic task of tattooing. First two broad rings with geometric ornamentations were drawn in dark blue dye round the knees, and the design was then punctured into the skin with an adze-like instrument made from the thorns of a small palm. For hours the artist hammered mercilessly and the thorns pricked into the sensitive skin round the hollows of the knees. Curiously enough, even the whimpering of the victim followed a prescribed custom, swelling up and down in little cascades. The other girls did not show much sympathy with their moaning friend, but considered the whole affair more or less amusing, and continually broke into peals of laughter. What woman would not think it natural to suffer in order to be beautiful? Returning after some time I found the operation completed, and the patient sitting in the shadow enjoying a meal of rice and taro with the other women.

It is proof of the enviable health of the Nagas that the tattooing wounds, though they often bleed profusely, hardly



17. *Mauwang, the Chief of Longkhai*

ever become septic. Even the best constitution, however, is no protection against diseases like malaria, and, while Wacking lies above the danger zone, the villages on the lower ridges often suffer severely. Wherever I arrived, numerous natives crowded round my camp, hoping to be cured of something or other. As long as it was only a question of malaria, quinine brought at least temporary relief; and I even attained some measure of success when treating acute indigestion or open wounds. But I learnt to curse my reputation, which used to fly before me into the villages, so that I would arrive to find crowds waiting to be treated. After all, what was I to do with people, like one old woman in Oting, who complained of a pain in her stomach, which, she told me, had begun when she was a young girl? Nothing will convince the Naga that not every white man is a physician with miraculous capacities and inexhaustible supplies of medicines for all imaginable maladies. Their confidence in my little pills and jars of ointments was all the more touching, as the Nagas themselves have spectacular remedies, which must appeal much more to their mentality. They believe, for instance, that washing the body in the blood of a slaughtered enemy will cure leprosy.

Hungphoi was the noisiest village I have ever been in. Large crowds of children surrounded my hut the whole day, but as soon as I approached, hoping to make friends with them, they would disperse with loud shrieks. Children of seven and eight carried their small brothers and sisters on their back, and I cannot imagine how these infants slept solidly through all the noise. I would not have minded if the children had only screamed and shouted; I should have got used to that, but unfortunately their incredible curiosity drove them to creep up to the walls of my hut and peep through the plaited walls at all hours of the day or night. Whether I ate, washed, or wrote my diary, each movement of mine would result in a torrent of whispered remarks on the odd behaviour of the white man, until I was so infuriated that I would either leave the hut or extinguish my oil lamp. If only I could have turned their interest to some purpose; but their boldness behind the

protecting wall changed to the most unbelievable shyness whenever I pointed my camera in their direction.

After a few days I decided to leave Hungphoi, and so we started for Longkhai through the reaped rice-fields under a radiant sky. The chief himself waited for us on the top of the hill before his village with one of the gaonburas. Mauwang, the Ang of Longkhai, is the only Great Ang in administered territory, and I was very interested to meet him. He was comparatively tall, middle-aged, with the strongest and most impressive personality I met among the Nagas; but he had none of the august dignity of the Great Angs of Mon, Chi, and Sheangha. His Assamese was poor, but the expressiveness of his face, worthy of any actor, lent such emphasis to every word, that there was hardly ever any doubt as to what he meant. And he had a wonderful sense of humour—that quality that so many times delighted me among the Nagas. He could talk with a deadly serious expression, and, suddenly changing his tone, would pull such grimaces that I could not help bursting into laughter. Perhaps it was the consciousness of his rank that encouraged him to make light of everything, or perhaps it was the artist in him that induced that particular versatility.

The only things he was really serious over were his works of art, and in these he took an almost childish pride. Yes, Mauwang was an artist; there was no one to equal him in the blacksmith's art in the whole district, and only his deaf-and-dumb half-brother carved more beautifully in wood. To understand his creative genius you would have to see him before a rough block of wood with his chisel in his hand. He would look at the wood lovingly for a little, and then suddenly the strong blows of the hammer would make the chips fly. Unhesitatingly the chisel sank into the wood; faster and faster fell the blows of the hammer; and soon a human body seemed to grow out of the wood. Perhaps it would be an arm that came first, then a head. Quicker and quicker he worked, without even a pause, and now you could see that the figure was not to remain alone; already there was an arm of a second figure lying round the shoulder of the first. Gradually, as Mauwang hammered



18. Carving on the central post of the Ang Morung of Longkhai



on, a love-couple took shape, with entwined arms. The extraordinary thing was that once he had begun his work he never paused to think how it was the arm should lie, or what position the feet might take. The sculpture must have stood before his spiritual eyes, before the first stroke of the chisel. Only when the figures had been worked out in rough, Mauwang would begin the finer retouching with a small knife.

Most wood-carvings of the Konyaks serve to decorate their men's houses. In Longkhai the morungs are full of carvings, most of them works of the present Ang, his deaf-and-dumb half-brother, or a deceased third brother. This third brother was the greatest genius of the three, perhaps because his work was the most mature; on one of the main posts of the Ang morung a particular carving of a man and a woman surpassed in force and expression and real artistic feeling all the carvings in Longkhai, which included such weird, queer subjects as a snake swallowing a frog.

Of all the villages I had visited on this tour I enjoyed Longkhai the most. It seemed to me that it was here that I started fully to realize the fascination of these brown people. Perhaps it was Mauwang's personality, or the feeling that he had accomplished something in his life, that brought me so near to the people of Longkhai; or may it not be that, unconsciously, life in the other villages had been too easy, and that it had first seemed unreal to an observer? But here in Longkhai it was different; the Ang had seen difficult times; even though he was a sacred chief of the 'Great Ang Clan', he had had to fight for his position. When Mauwang was still a boy, his father had been imprisoned for three years in Kohima for violating the new law against head-hunting; and when finally he was released, he had decided, rather than risk another such unpleasant experience, to leave his home and British territory. He settled down with his cousin the Great Ang of Mon, and took his eldest son with him across the border. Only the boy Mauwang remained in Longkhai, in the house of a relative, and the long years of his growing up saw the great house of the old Ang fall gradually in ruins; the prestige of the Ang family seemed lost in Longkhai. Little care was taken of

the houseless boy, Mauwang, for he was unable to fulfil the duties of a chief. Since he could not entertain his subjects, they would not work on his fields or rebuild his house.

Mauwang's face had a strained, sad look as he told of those first hard years; they were years full of shame for the son of a Great Ang, those sad years before he found a way of winning back his father's throne. But his face lightened with one of those miraculous changes—it was as though he had found anew the solution of his lost heritage. He told me how he had apprenticed himself to the blacksmith in the village, how he had learnt to forge knives, daos, spear-heads, and hoes; how then he began to make ceremonial spears for the Ang women, inventing little figures of iron to put between the points of the two-pronged spears. And eventually, after working for a few years, he sold so many of his creations that he was able to collect enough money to buy a buffalo and several baskets of rice. Triumphantly his eyes burned. At last he had been able to give the people a feast, and so they rebuilt his house for him. It was a noble house that he pointed to on the other side of the open place. There the building stood, more than 100 feet long, where he lived with his wife, the daughter of the Ang of Chi. He had wooed her with twenty daos, sixty spears, two big pigs, seven chickens, one goat, a great quantity of salt, and two baskets of 'pan' leaves.

It was growing chilly outside, and the Ang got up from the porch of the morung, and together we went over to his house. His wife sat in the main hall. She had a calm and graceful dignity, and was quite unembarrassed before me; in fact she surprised me a little by trying at once to enter into conversation, and even joke with us. Most graciously she gave me 'pan' leaves and betel, and I noticed how thin and well-shaped her hands were, and how delicate and tender her features, especially when she played fondly with her little three-year-old daughter, the only remaining child, for her two sons had died, and although Mauwang always hoped for another son to succeed him, he, too, adored this daughter.

12

TOWARDS UNKNOWN COUNTRY

ONE evening, while I was sitting with Mauwang on the large stone seat, his 'throne', outside the chief's house, we saw runners coming up the hill. They brought me a letter from Mills that he had sent to Wakching and the gaonburas had forwarded by two morung boys. I tore open the envelope. It held marvellous news. I had known for some time that Mills was planning an expedition into un-administered territory, and now he told me that he had obtained permission from the Government of Assam for me to accompany him. I was so excited that I jumped up and wanted to start at once, but it was too late, and I had to content myself with another night in Longkhai, leaving next morning almost at dawn.

It is not very far from Longkhai to Wakching, and yet the way back that day seemed long; ordinarily it would have been a pleasant march, in the sunny weather, but now I hardly noticed the country as I passed. I was turning over in my mind all those events which Mills had told me would probably lead to an expedition. Serious news had come from the tribal area, that the Kalyo Kengyus on the western slopes of the Patkoi Range were completely terrorizing their neighbours, and had developed the hunting of heads into systematic man-hunts. A few months ago they had treacherously raided and burnt two villages lying several days' journey from British territory. Only a few of the inhabitants escaped to tell the tale; the rest had been slaughtered or carried off as slaves. It was believed that the raiders were men of a Kalyo Kengyu village known as Pangsha, but Pangsha was not on the map, and even the two destroyed villages, Saochu and Kejok, lay near the eastern borders of the land surveyed in 1923 and 1924. Farther to the east was still unmapped, and the country of these Kalyo Kengyus had not yet been entered by any white man.

As long as the feuds in the tribal area are restricted to the usual head-hunting raids, a more or less casual affair leading to little loss of life, the British authorities do not usually interfere. But now whole villages had been wiped out and the survivors carried off into slavery. That, the Governments of Assam and Burma do not tolerate. They had fought a long time against slavery, for the most part successfully, but in the most remote mountains on the frontier of both countries such customs are not easy to control, and on rare occasions it still sometimes happens that slave-trading is carried on. The victims, however, do not work for their captors; they are not destined to be beasts of burden, but victims of human sacrifice.

It is difficult to distinguish clearly between head-hunting and human sacrifice, for the main importance of taking a head is not the glory of war, but the gain of the magical forces inherent in the skull. Why, therefore, should these forces not be acquired in a less dangerous way than by raiding? Then there is always the risk of losing your own head, or so the Konyak argues; and to lose your head on a raid is a disgraceful death for the Naga. No honour is accorded slain heroes, and their whole families suffer from the disgrace, for custom compels them to abandon their houses and throw away their property and ornaments.

My friends in Wakching were full of excitement when I told them that I was to go on the tour, and full of appreciation of the circumstances. They crowded round me, jabbering like monkeys; they wanted to impress me that they knew from my story exactly what had happened. They were sure it would mean a fight with the Kalyo Kengyus. If only they could all come too; but as I was going, I would bring back a head, and that would be nearly as good. Yes, I should bring them back a head. Again and again they implored me to capture an enemy and cut off the head. The men of Thepong, who were just building their morung, explained that it was imperative that they should have just such a trophy for the inauguration of their morung, and the remaining days in Wakching the young men harassed me continually. But where should I take a head

from? It was indeed a difficult problem. I could not exactly see myself stalking over the battle-field and decapitating the fallen foes, and yet I felt that my prestige in Wakching would be lost if I returned without a trophy!

The prospect of this adventure seemed to liven the minds of the old men. Like a torch, it lit the dark, forgotten corners of their own memories. The slave-raids of the Kalyo Kengyus brought to them other tales of their youth, when even here in the Wakching country the people had sometimes bought slaves and cut off their heads, thus gaining the magical virtue without running any risk. Such a deed was certainly considered less glorious than the slaying of an enemy in a raid, yet it conferred the right to the ornaments of a head-hunter.

‘One day, when I was a young man,’ related Chinyang, ‘the Chongwe people asked us whether we should like to buy a slave. “Where did you get him from?” we inquired at first. He was a boy they had captured from Mongnyu—that is a Phom village behind that mountain,’ and he pointed to one of the mountains to the south. ‘“So, he is a Phom; well, if he is a Phom, we’ll take him.” We paid for the boy twenty Layas,¹ one pig, and a lump of salt. All the men had to contribute. Then a few old men went to Chongwe to fetch the slave; it was a small boy, and he had no idea what was going to happen. They put a feather head-dress on his head and led him away with friendly words, for they felt sorry for the boy. There below, near the river, our young men lay in hiding; when they saw the boy, they rushed up to him and cut him into pieces. But I only looked on,’ added Chinyang, ‘for I had captured heads in a real raid, and, after all, it is rather a shame to kill such a young boy.’

Yongang had behaved with less reserve. He told me he had carried off a leg of the victim, and that after a few moments, when nothing had been left of the boy, the Wakching men hurried home singing and dancing.

Although this was not an isolated case, the buying and selling of slaves was not considered quite right by my

¹ Brass discs, now worth between two and six rupees.

Wakching friends. Perhaps it was that they had already unconsciously adopted a few of the standards of the plains, to which they lived so near; or perhaps it was only one of their natural and may be one of their more fundamentally primitive characteristics; for they told us indignantly that the people of several villages to the south used to sell even their own brothers and clansmen. The sky-god Gawang gets very angry about such deeds, they told me, and punishes the offenders during their lifetime. Whoever sells a human being into slavery will never have a son, and will die early.

But the Kalyo Kengyus were apparently not bound by any such scruples, and though I never discovered what their gods thought of the matter, they themselves certainly considered the capture and selling of slaves as an extremely profitable business, and one that they would not easily renounce. Armed force alone would impress them, as it always impresses primitive minds, and Mills was to depend on an armed escort to bring success to his mission.

The 10th of November was the day fixed for assembling in Mokokchung. Mills said we would probably start on one of the following days; and that meant leaving Wakching four days earlier. Hardly had I begun my preparations when I suddenly went down with fever. Living so long out of the danger-zone in Wakching, I had been careless enough not to take any prophylactics in the malaria-infested villages of Oting and Longkhai. Could there have been a more inconvenient time for such an attack? At first I thought it would only be a light bout, and brushed the whole thing aside, but the fever mounted steadily and my head became muzzy. In the intervals when I could think clearly, I worried that I would not be able to arrive at Mokokchung in time, and that the long-hoped-for expedition into unexplored territory would start without me. It was a miserable situation, and I cursed my negligence—and the malaria-infested Longkhai and Oting. Luckily I had atebrin with me, which is supposed to be far more effective than quinine, and is said to cure malaria within four or five days. I dosed myself heavily, and the results were excellent. I was free of fever on the fifth day.

As soon as I stood firmly on my legs, I started with Nlamo and a few coolies, for I had hardly enough time to get to Mokokchung. Again we crossed the Dikhu valley, but the atmosphere was not so damp and oppressive as it had been four months ago, and the flooded, mud-coloured river of the rains had changed to a clear stream, quietly running over white sandbanks.

I spent only one night in Tamlu and in each of the Ao villages of Chantongia and Mongsenyimti; my pace seemed quick even to the Konyaks, but I arrived in Mokokchung punctually on the 10th.

The small settlement resembled a bee-hive. It had been so calm, so empty, the last time I had been there with Mills, and now coolies streamed together from all directions, surging between the houses. Every open space was occupied by camps, and groups of Aos, Lhotas, Sangtams, and Rengmas crowded together under provisional shelters. Dobashis in red cloths hurried through the swarms of people on what appeared to be important errands, and men of different tribes shouted at the top of their voices—some kind of compensation for the lack of a common tongue.

I caught sight of G. W. J. Smith, a young police officer, in the middle of this confusion. He was then Subdivisional Officer at Mokokchung, and had the not very enviable task of hiring the coolies, dividing them into groups, and seeing that the loads were equally distributed. We had to carry considerable provisions with us, for even in friendly Naga villages there would hardly be enough to feed the whole column, and to live on the land in hostile country would be entirely impossible. A coolie who has to carry his own food for several weeks cannot carry a very heavy load in addition, and although we had established rice-dumps in friendly villages beyond the border, we needed every one of our 360 coolies to carry kit and provisions for the four of us, our escort of 150 men of the Assam Rifles, and the staff of dobashis.

Our Naga coolies were by no means only hired carriers; they were all volunteers, only a few joining the expedition for the sake of 'filthy' lucre. Most of them hoped to participate

in the fighting, which they were convinced we would meet, and so gain the right to the dress and ornaments of a head-hunter, which they were unable to acquire in administered territory. It seemed a little ironic that they should accompany a British expedition to recapture the glories of the head-hunting days, but I am sure they did not think of such things. They were eager and ready for any kind of scrap, armed with spears, daos, and shields: curious-looking warriors, slightly stooping under the weight of their conical carrying-baskets.

Mills was already in Mokokchung, and Major Williams, the military commander of the expedition, arrived that same evening. We all dined together in Smith's bungalow, and discussed the prospects of the tour. Rumours of the attitude of the hostile tribes, spreading from village to village, had reached Mokokchung and created great excitement among the dobashis and coolies. There was not a man among them who doubted that there would be a fight—in fact, they did not hope for anything else. Mills, Major Williams, Smith, and myself did not quite share the enthusiasm of the Nagas, and we discussed the best method of defence against a sudden attack. The narrow jungle-paths lend themselves admirably to the Nagas' special form of ambush, and an enemy can come within a few yards of you completely unseen, and then even the strongest escort is not much protection. After my experience with the rat I had little confidence in my revolver. You so easily miss the target when you are excited, and Smith and I finally agreed that a shower of S.S.G. shot in the face of an attacker would be the most effective deterrent.

We spent two more days in preparations before all the coolies were ready and all the loads packed. My own luggage consisted of my tent and three carrying-baskets containing mainly clothes and warm bedding. When we left Mokokchung on Friday, the 13th November, the whole of the village was on foot to watch the departure of this strange crusade against the slave-raiders. The women and children crowded on the bamboo platforms staring at the long file of sepoys, and the gaonburas held up the whole of

the column at the last minute in the middle of the village by offering us farewell drinks of rice-beer. Was this the usual custom when setting out on a head-hunting raid?

Twelve men marched ahead; they formed a kind of advance guard. Mills, Williams, and I followed with the main body; then came Smith in front of the coolies, interspersed with a few of the sepoys, and a small rearguard concluded the column, which drew out over a mile. The sepoys of the Assam Rifles, most of them Gurkhas, wore light-blue flannel shirts, shorts, and hats with broad brims; and they carried bayonets, and large curved bush-knives indispensable for camp-building and clearing the way through thick jungle.

Travelling first east and then south-east, the long column wound along the cultivated slopes into the valley of the Upper Dikhu, where we crossed the river on a bridge of high piles, the coolies wading through the shallow water. This first day was very quiet; we were still in administered country, and apart from one of the coolies, who managed to spike his leg on the spear of the man behind, there were no casualties. As on many days to come, there was a fairly stiff climb in the afternoon, for, going east, we had to travel almost at right angles to innumerable, long-drawn-out ridges. Nagas always settle on the tops of the mountains, and since we usually camped for convenience near a village, the daily routine entailed starting in the cool of dawn downhill, arriving in the hot, stuffy valley about midday, when the sun was hottest, and then climbing up the mountain as the sun sank, to spend the night on some frozen height. That first day we climbed to Chare, lying 2400 feet above the valley. The people had built us a camp on a slope before the village gate—two huts and numerous shelters of bamboo and banana leaves, with just enough space between for our tents.

Getting into camp was astonishingly easy, for the first apparent confusion dissolved in a very short time. The sepoys, their rifles always on their backs, improved the shelters, and the coolies had soon lit fires and fetched water to boil their rice. Mills and I went to the village to gossip

with the gaonburas over mugs of rice-beer and hear something of Sangtam customs.

Cows and goats were killed for our coolies, and soon after they had been divided up a most savoury smell of roasting meat enveloped the camp. The dignitaries of Chare sat with the dobashis and gaonburas of our party round a large open fire at the gate of the village quite near our tent. It was not long before the thirst of the visitors was quenched and tongues loosened, for, as we ate our dinner of chicken-curry, we could hear them laughing almost as clearly as if we had been amongst them. This was apparently the 'club' of Chare, and the conversation was so noisy that we sincerely hoped it was not 'extension night'.

Next morning it rained, and it was still raining when we broke camp. At midday we crossed the Chimei River, which forms the frontier of the administered territory, leaving British India behind and entering the land of the independent Naga Tribes. If only the crossing of all frontiers were so simple, so inconspicuous as that exit from British India!

After a long and tiring march we camped for the night at Phire-ahire. We were now in the middle of the Sangtam country, inhabited by a tribe not so very different from the Aos, which has been gradually driven northwards by its more warlike Sema neighbours.

These first days were so easy and comfortable, and we were always received with such friendliness, that it was hardly believable that we were on anything but a rather large inspection tour. However, here in Chare we tasted a little of what might come, for a gaonbura showed us a poisoned arrow and proudly held up the magnificent tusks of a boar. 'The animal had only run thirty yards after it had been hit,' he explained. We were not very enthusiastic over this hunting exploit. The arrow was too like those arrows we had heard that the Kalyo Kengyus used in such a deadly way. They are short cross-bow arrows of bamboo, with iron barbed heads; the poison is applied in thick layers just behind the head, and the shaft nicked so that it breaks off easily, leaving the poisoned head in the wound. Some time ago Mills obtained a small quantity of this substance

and sent it to Calcutta to be analysed. It had not been identified, but experiments proved that it was a powerful poison, causing death by paralysing the respiratory organs. The victim, the report continued, could be saved by the administration of oxygen through artificial respiration. Not exactly a comforting thought, many days' march from medical aid. However, watching several of the youths of the village who shot with cross-bows at the gable-figures of the house, we noted that every one missed his mark, and our anxiety was somewhat allayed. If the Pangsha warriors were no better shots, there was no need to worry.

The next evening we were to camp at Chongtore, and since this meant only a short march, Mills and I decided to make a detour over the hills to visit some of the more remote villages, while the column took the direct path. The country seemed so peaceful that we did not think it necessary to take an escort. It would only have frightened the Nagas and filled them with mistrust.

Leaving the column, we climbed steeply for a short way to the village of Holongba, lying with its rather miserable grass-thatched houses irregularly scattered over the ridge. None of the Survey Parties of former years had touched Holongba, and we were therefore the first white men to cross the threshold of the village. It is the dream of every anthropologist once to enter 'virgin' country, and so this was a particularly solemn moment for me. The natives were not at all shy, and even the women, entertaining their unusual guests with gourds of rice-beer, seemed quite at ease and unaffected. The houses were smaller than the Konyak houses, and by the light of smouldering fires the furniture seemed poorer and people's faces thinner. How soon the affluent look of the fertile country disappears on even these first wind-swept mountains of the higher ranges! Holongba, and many of the other villages across the frontier welcomed Mills with sincere pleasure. Can the value of British methods of administration be better demonstrated than by the sympathy and respect he enjoyed even beyond the boundaries of his own district?

But all strangers are not given such a friendly reception,

for rows of bleached skulls hung in the drum-houses, telling grim tales of less fortunate visitors from other tribes. Yes, they were all skulls of other tribes, for the Sangtams do not hang up in the morung the heads of their own tribesmen with whom they may have had a slight misunderstanding, but throw such heads into the jungle. Walking through the village you recognize the houses of the renowned heroes, for the taking part in a successful head-hunting raid means another plaited cane ball on the string hanging from the gable of the house; on one string, I counted no less than thirty trophies. These strings, with their head-tallies, are put on a man's grave together with the skulls of all animals slaughtered during his life. Impaled on posts, they speak more clearly than any tombstone inscription of the dead man's deeds. There are little fences round every grave, and drinking-gourds turned upside down on the head of the spikes tell of the last mug of beer the mourners have drunk with the dead.

Most of that day Mills and I walked over the open ridge looking over the country of the Sema Nagas. It had cleared up during the day, but as we reached the village of Anangba, it started raining again, and a wet, cold wind soughing over the hills made life appear anything but rosy at a height of 6600 feet.

Mills found his old friend Chirongchi waiting to greet him. He was a man with an eventful past, for he had enlisted during the Great War, when the Naga Labour Corps recruited in administered territory, and the news of this great war of the white Sahibs penetrated even to Anangba. The chance of great deeds of war induced him to join the ' raid ', and he soon found himself with many other Nagas on the way to Europe. It speaks for their cold-bloodedness that although they had never seen a great water before, they did not panic when they were shipwrecked in the Mediterranean. To their bitter disappointment, once in France, they were not allowed to fight, but put to the more peaceful task of building roads; it was incomprehensible to them that they were not even allowed to cut off the heads of fallen foes. The only trophy that ever found its way into the Naga Hills

was the spiked helmet of a Prussian grenadier—not a bad substitute! Chirongchi himself succeeded in smuggling an army rifle in his uniform trousers, but a rifle without cartridges could be of little use in Anangba, and he finally gave it up to the district officer at Mokokchung. I wonder whether the experience of his journey to Europe has widened his horizon. He appeared very dignified in a magnificent plaited hat with floating red goat's hair, but in no way different from his less-travelled fellow-villagers.

He showed us with pride the skull of Pukovi, a notorious Sema Naga who had raided even into the administered territory, causing Mills much anger by his incorrigible misdeeds. It must be startling to find your acquaintance in such stark circumstances, but perhaps Mills was a little grateful to Chirongchi, and did not take it too much to heart when he found his old friend hanging in the drum-house. Only too well he remembered Pukovi's notorious feats: how once he had suggested to some neighbouring Semas that they should raid his own village, and how he had marked the roofs with bundles of straw so that the right people should be murdered. It was unfortunate that a girl from Anangba happened to be staying in the village at the time, and was murdered with her hosts, for Chirongchi did not forget, and many years later decoyed Pukovi to Anangba and cut off his head with his own hands. Now Pukovi's skull dangles in the drum-house, to the general satisfaction of the villagers of Anangba.

We came into Chongtore in time for tea, and very thankful we were for it. The rest of the column had arrived an hour or so earlier, and the sepoys had already built a spacious camp. The wind got up as the light failed, and it was bitingly cold in the one-sided bamboo pavilion where we ate our supper, wrapped in coats, as on an arctic expedition. We shivered with cold, while the gale blew mercilessly all night, billowing in the sides of my tent until I thought that any moment it would be carried away.

13

THE CAMP ON A PEAK

A HUGE tree had fallen across the brook, or perhaps the Nagas had pushed it there to act as a bridge. It was still wet from the night's rain, but the long file of our coolies unconcernedly balanced their loads over the slippery trunk. For my part I hated such tree-bridges; my nailed boots found no grip on the slimy bark, but, rather than wade through the cold water, I tried my hand as a tight-rope dancer, contributing at least to the amusement of the party. Mills shared my prejudice against such tree-bridges, and usually preferred the wet but secure way through the river.

Our path rose almost perpendicularly ahead, sheer from the narrow valley filled with abundant jungle. The steep slope, only sparsely covered with low bushes, meant many hours unprotected under a broiling sun, which had at last dispersed the clouds. Endlessly we climbed, and the wooded peak of Mount Helipong stood always above us—high above—and never any nearer.

‘Hokshe, how far may it be to Helipong?’ asked Smith for the third time, as yet again he took off his topee and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

‘Perhaps an hour and a half, Sahib; we are not far any more.’

Silently we climbed on. It seemed hardly possible that early this morning we had sat, covered in pullovers, with chattering teeth, over the breakfast-table. It was now incredibly hot. After another hour Smith stopped again.

‘Listen, Hokshe. The ridge up there looks just as far as it did before. When in hell are we getting to Helipong?’

‘Perhaps in two hours, Sahib, if we go quickly.’

‘Damn you! an hour ago you told me that it was only an hour and a half to Helipong, and now you say it should be still two hours?’

‘Certainly, Sahib; but if I had told you then that we

had still three hours to climb, your mind would have hurt. And we would not have got on quicker, anyhow. Why should I have told you something unpleasant?' His logic was convincing, and grimly we climbed on.

At last the secondary jungle gave way to tall forest, quite different from the woods in the lower regions; wild bananas and ordinary bamboos do not grow at these heights, but only a certain thin, thorny bamboo that stands the intense cold. Enormous trees stretched their gnarled branches against the sky, and from the rich, dark earth, formed by centuries of fallen and rotten leaves, sprang an impenetrable undergrowth. Almost the whole year round clouds hang round these mountains, and now a white mist filled the forest. When we stepped into the open, leaving the protection of the trees, a strong summit-wind dispersed the mist, and the village of Helipong lay before us.

Not more than twenty houses clung to the bare rocks, 7280 feet above sea-level, while a little way away several granaries stood in a small hollow, seeming to seek even the smallest protection on these storm-ridden peaks. We were told that the harvest had only just been brought in and the granaries were full of millet and hardy Job's tears cultivated on the slopes below the forest belt. Rice does not grow well in these regions, and the people of Helipong consider it a rare luxury.

When leaving the protection of the forest we had pulled out some warm things from the baskets, yet in spite of all our clothes we shivered in the icy wind. But the men and women of Helipong walked about apparently quite comfortable with little more than loin-cloths. Strangely enough, they have not adapted their dress to the climate, and the mere look of their bare backs made me freeze. Their lot seemed less deplorable only when we sat in one of their astonishingly warm huts.

Why should these few people choose to settle here? It seemed strange that they had selected these uninviting heights. The reason was a political one; this was the much-contested frontier district between the Sangtams and the Chang Nagas; and the small village of Helipong, built as

an outpost by the Changs, secures their right to the whole ridge. Outside the village we found a concrete proof of the support lent to the small community by their more powerful tribesmen: a human hand suspended from a bamboo pole. Rather wizened it looked, but quite recognizable. It was a complimentary present, the people of Helipong told us, they had been sent by the Changs of Chentang, and obviously they were proud of their unusual gift. The men of Helipong, though rendered immune from attack by their splendid strategical position, are too few in number to sally forth on raids of their own, and they are grateful when their tribesmen from the lower and more fertile ridges send them a share in their spoils of war. No doubt they feel they are participating in the exciting world below them, for the people of Helipong must spend their whole lives looking down on mountains and valleys, which, except for the hills to the east of their friends the Changs, are more effectively closed to them than by the stoutest iron bars. Certain death awaits the wanderer in a country where to be a stranger is tantamount to a death-sentence.

The view from Mount Helipong over an immense-mountain country was magnificent. We overlooked the land of the Lhotas and Aos as far as the distant hills of the Konyaks. The country of the Changs and Sangtams lay at our feet, and in the east the unexplored mountains of the Kalyo Kengyus and the Patkoi Range, with the 12,622-feet peak of Mount Saramati, were clearly visible. Here in Helipong we were on the watershed between the Brahmaputra and the Irrawaddy. The rivers to the east belong to the basin of the Chindwin; following them, if you were lucky enough not to lose your head en route, you would arrive in Burma. All these high ridges, running almost at right angles to our proposed route, were not a very encouraging sight, and yet the glimpse we had caught of the distant Patkoi Range only increased my wish to penetrate deeper and deeper into that maze of wooded peaks.

Even as we watched, the view that had lain so clearly before our eyes began to veil itself. Shreds of hunted clouds stormed across the sky and caught on the peaks till a burst

of wind, jerking them upwards, swept them on. Now it was as though the mountains spat white steam, for the sun suddenly withdrew, and the clouds thickened, rose, were driven over several ridges, and dissolved again. It was a wild, grand scene that played over the open theatre of the sky; and then suddenly the clouds were white no longer, but tinged with scarlet in the light of the setting sun.

That evening Major Williams thought it would be a good idea to hold a trial alarm to train the coolies in case of an attack on our camp later. At a given signal they rushed with spears, shields, and daos to the stockade, forming a second and a living wall. In spite of the fatigue of the most exhausting day's march, their tense, fierce faces showed clearly that they were ready to throw themselves on any enemy and if possible cut off their heads. Long after, when I had returned to Europe, and happened to arrive in the middle of an air-raid alarm, I could not help contrasting the faces of the people round me with those eager faces behind the stockade on Mount Helipong.

Again storm raged round our tents that night, and even covered as we were by every available blanket, we spent another shivering night. In the morning a thin, penetrating rain fell noiselessly, and nothing was to be seen of yesterday's view. We dropped down on the other side of Mount Helipong; perhaps this side was not as steep as the one we had come up, but the roughness of the path made walking difficult. We soon left the country of the Changs, although we were to cross back into their territory later, and our march that day and our subsequent camp were in Yimsungr country, the land of a scarcely-known tribe which in some respects resembles the Changs. A little uncertain of our reception, we marched the whole day on our guard, a precaution that seemed not entirely unjustified by the equally suspicious attitude of the villagers of Kuthurr when we arrived there that evening. They were, it is true, not altogether unfriendly, and even sent us the customary 'salaams' of pigs and chickens, but we felt that this courtesy was dictated rather by the size of our column than by any spirit of generosity or welcome. Had we arrived

singly, or even in a small number, there can be no doubt that their joy at such unusual guests would have taken other forms, and our chances of ever leaving Kuthurr would have been slight, for our skulls would have certainly occupied places of honour in the men's house. In fact we mistrusted the Yimsungr as much as they seemed to mistrust us, and when building our camp we took particular care of the fortification, reinforcing it with a strong palisade of spiked bamboos.

Next morning, when I wanted to take photographs in the village while the sepoys broke camp, Major Williams insisted that I should take an escort of five men. I felt like a convict, as, surrounded by sepoys with levelled bayonets, I walked through the narrow streets, while the inhabitants of Kuthurr watched my odd behaviour with the camera with profound suspicion. It was characteristic of the atmosphere that there was not a woman and not a child to be seen; uncertain of our intentions, the men had apparently sent them into the safety of the mountains long before we arrived. Under these circumstances and taking into consideration the wariness of the male occupants, the absence of the normal life of the village, and the spiked barrage with which I was surrounded, a few notes on the style of the houses and a few photographs were all that I achieved.

That day, keeping on the border of Yimsungr country, we turned north-east, and camped at the Chang village of Chentang. As long as we marched through the country without incident, our days were much the same, for, starting at about eight in the morning, we would march until midday, when we would rest for a short while, and munch our sandwiches, and perhaps one of the dobashis would produce rice-beer, which in some miraculous way they always seemed to carry with them. Indeed, we had a joke that Nakhu, our head dobashi, would be able to produce rice-beer even in the middle of the Sahara. And then we would go on through the afternoon, and finally come into camp about three o'clock, thus leaving enough time to build a palisade before dark.

On the path to Chentang, one of the dobashis pointed to

where a couple of months ago an old man of Chentang had been ambushed by three men from the Yimsungr village of Sangpurr. Lying in the bushes at the side of the path, he said, they had waited till the old man had passed, then they had speared him in the back as he tried to escape, and cut off his head. I was used to this kind of tale, yet the idea of the poor old man, running for his life with a spear in his back, shattered me for a moment. Perhaps it was that those other stories had all been told to me in friendly, peaceful country, where they appeared more or less as fairy-tales of some bygone day, but here in Yimsungr country the atmosphere of hostile tribes provided reality enough for the gruesome account.

‘I like you anthropologists,’ remarked Mills; ‘you come to the Naga Hills in order to study the head-hunters, and when we show you a nice little practical example, you are horrified. I am sure that more than one man has been slaughtered on this path.’

He was right, for outside Chentang we passed under a pipe-line that, we were told, the men of Chentang had been forced to build because so many of their women had been killed in the last years on the way to the spring to fetch water. It was a clever idea, for the water now flows unaided from the spring through the narrow bamboo pipes supported on poles, high above the ground, to within the defences of the village.

But the Yimsungr are warlike people, and since apparently they no longer found an opportunity of ambushing the women of Chentang when they fetched water, they entered the village while the men worked on the fields, and set fire to the houses. One man of Sangpurr lost his head in the adventure, and it was his hand we had seen hung up in Helipong. But even the head dangling from a high bamboo pole in Chentang was small comfort to the people for the loss of their houses.

More than half of the village had been burnt, and now only a few small miserable huts stood among the charred posts. In this part of the country there is a great scarcity of trees, and at short notice it is often difficult to replace the houses with their strong posts and gable boards.

Outside the village our attention was attracted by a small hut on high bamboo poles. It contained the corpse of a favourite hunting-dog, and there were a monkey-skull and several cane rings, tallying his hunting successes in the same manner as on the graves of men.

We chose a site for the camp in a small dip in the ground, overgrown with grass, and set two pickets on the surrounding hills; for though Pangsha was still far away, we were in the middle of the much-troubled area, near the borders of the three tribes, Chang, Yimsungr, and Kalyo Kengyu. It would have been unwise to reckon without the possibility of surprise attacks.

14

THE RESCUED SLAVES

FEATHERS fluttered on the top of the hill as we climbed slowly up the saddle of the mountain between Chentang and Chingmei; Chingmak, the chief of Chingmei, had sent his warriors in full ceremonial dress to welcome us, and it was their high hornbill feathers we had seen quivering on their red, plaited cane hats. They had rolls of indigo-blue cloths, embroidered with cowrie shells, tied over the breast and back, protecting the most vulnerable parts of the body against blows; their sword-like daos were stuck in sheaths at the back, which formed part of the broad belt. With a single movement these daos can be drawn over the shoulder and crashed down on the head of an enemy. Beside this weapon, the men carried long spears, tufted with red goat's hair, and heavy shields of buffalo hide.

The warriors led us through the forest and over open clearings to the village. Many years ago the chief, Chingmak, had undertaken the long journey to Mokokchung to make friends with Mills, and he welcomed us now with overflowing pleasure. It had been agreed that we should use his village as a base, pushing on from here into the land of the Kalyo Kengyus, and Chingmak was to serve as mediator in the negotiations with neighbouring villages. This meant a great deal of prestige for his village, and he was only too happy to render us every possible support to our expedition, for Chingmei had a long-standing feud with the Kalyo Kengyu villages to the east.

The Chingmei people had built us a large camp on the flat top of a hill not far from their village. Several spacious, straw-covered huts served as welcome shelters for the sepoys, and though we pitched our own tents, we were pleased to eat our meals within four walls once more. The posts of our 'dining-room' were decorated with the most surprising wood-carvings. Naturalistic symbols of masculine power

were probably the greatest form of compliment, and meant to show that the Chingmei men took us for real 'he-men', to whose houses the same carvings should be accorded as to their own morungs.

Chingmei, the last Chang bulwark against the Kalyo Kengyus, is a large, strongly fortified village, encircled by a double stockade set with sharp bamboo spikes; sentry-boxes high up in the trees dominate the narrow entrances and the doors bristling with spikes.

The houses within the stockade have steeply-sloping roofs, rising from just above the ground at the back to about thirty feet in front; thus the gables, protruding far over the façade, are so close together that the roofs often dove-tail, and the streets, running in between the houses, are completely overshadowed. This has an advantage in the rains, for, protected by the jutting gables, you can pass from one house to the other with dry feet. Even steeper and more sloping, the roofs of the morungs tower high above the other houses, and give the village the bizarre and characteristic silhouette of all Chang settlements.

The first call we paid in the village was naturally at the house of the chief, or rather I should say the houses of the chief, for Chingmak, not content with his first wife, the mother of two already grown-up and famous sons, had married a second time, and, wisely recognizing that two wives under one roof are not conducive to domestic happiness, had built a new house opposite his old one. Chingmak's second wife had given him two daughters. They were still quite small, and one of them, a girl of about ten, immediately found a place in Mills' heart. It was amazing how confidently the little girl approached the strange white man, and how she would sit quite near him on the ground while he talked with her father. I remember, when Chingmak once brought her to our camp, the interest she showed in all the unusual things, and especially in our water-glasses. Again and again she put her little fist into the glass, and could hardly believe that anything transparent could be so solid.

Strangely enough, though Chang and Kalyo Kengyus are



19. *Chingmak, the Chief of Chingmei, with the breast tattoo of a head-hunter*

almost continually at war, Chingmak's first wife came from the Kalyo Kengyu village of Panso. Such marriages are said to be quite common, and the Chingmei men seem to entertain no scruples if they have to fight against the brothers and the fathers of their wives, even if they eventually bring their heads home in triumph—a rather drastic way of venting a feeling common enough among 'in-laws' all the world over.

When Chingmak had visited Mokokchung, Mills had treated him with great honour, and now he showed us proudly over every inch of Chingmei. He took us first to the morungs, where he pointed out the skull of a famous Panso warrior, the captor of fifty heads. There were many other skulls, some bleached and old and some apparently new, hanging in the morung. In fact, it was quite a remarkable collection, for on many of them buffalo and mithan horns were fastened, thus increasing their magical power and furthering the 'virtue' of the whole village. Chingmak showed us a peculiar funeral monument that had been erected in the village. It was a huge crescent of plaited bamboo, representing a rainbow, raised several feet off the ground, and staked with wooden forked posts, which Chingmak explained were tallies for the buffalo and mithan sacrifices performed by the deceased.

But our appreciation waxed loudest when we discovered that the slaves we had set out to rescue were already waiting for us in Chingmei. For since we had received the threatening message from Pangsha in Chentang, we had given up all hope of a peaceful understanding. The messages had declared that Pangsha had no intention whatsoever of giving up their captives; that they were not afraid of a crowd of women, as they called us, and that they would not even honour us by fighting with spears and daos, but would beat us off with the wooden rice-pounding pestles of their wives.

We had not taken these menaces literally, but now we were astonished that the bare news of our persistent advance had driven the Pangsha men to part with their victims. Chingmak told us that they had delegated their allies of Yimpang, a village in sight of our camp, to mediate with him, and had sent him the three slaves without demanding

a ransom; and Yimpang, impressed by the behaviour of the more powerful village, and at the same time afraid of the punishment that might be meted out to them for their participation in the raid on Saochu and Kejok, had bought two of the other slaves back from Pangsha, delivering them up with the other three to Chingmei.

I have never seen more miserable creatures than these five 'slaves': a young woman, a youth of about twenty, two small boys, and a small girl. After the massacre of their relatives they had been dragged off to hostile villages, conscious always of the terrible death awaiting them. All through the hills the tales of human sacrifices among those tribes in the east are only too well known, and the two adults, at least, can have had little doubt as to their ultimate fate.

Few of the captives of those tribes ever live long; for just as mithan and buffaloes are sacrificed by the Angamis, the tribes on the Patkoi mountains behead a slave at their feasts of merit. A humanitarian trait in these cruel ceremonies is perhaps the custom of making the victim so drunk before slaughter that he goes to his death only half conscious. At the erecting of a man's house the sacrifice of a human being strengthens the new building; the trussed slave is thrown into the hole, and is crushed as the main post comes smashing down. But the worst fate awaits those slaves who are sacrificed at the sowing of the rice, for it is said that the victim is bound to a stake, from where he must watch the flames creeping up the dry felled jungle, roaring as the wind fans them. The spirit which leaves the poor charred body is believed to fertilize the crops.

The Chingmei men did not understand the language of the captives, and so it had been impossible to explain to them the change in their fate, and now they certainly thought that these curiously pale people, with the bewildering behaviour, were those notorious adepts in human sacrifice to whom they had been sold. Our Konyak dobashi, Pongwei talked the language of Saochu, but their minds were so dimmed by fear that at first they could not grasp what was said. Patiently and slowly Pongwei continued,

and only when he asked the two older slaves about their experiences did they seem to understand; then they explained haltingly that after the burning of Saochu, they had been hurried to Pangsha by the raiders. No, they had not been too badly treated, and had always had enough to eat, but the Pangsha men, although not afraid of the young women and children running away, had thought the man might try to escape, and had hammered on his knees till he was quite lame; even now he could not walk very well.

Far worse than the physical hardships of captivity had been the fear of their future fate. The terror of the last months had so eaten into their minds that the two grown-up slaves, even when they did understand they were free, could only continue to stare apathetically ahead, and showed no relief at being rescued.

It was easier to make the children laugh again, and with good food and friendly treatment they soon climbed happily on Mills' knees and played with his pipe.

The release of these five 'slaves' did not end our mission; Pangsha still held another girl, the sister of the woman from Saochu, and as long as she remained in their hands, we could not think of returning. Besides, Pangsha had apparently experienced a change of heart, or perhaps they thought we would not bother any more now that we had five of the slaves. They sent us new messages: if we dared to approach their territory they would kill us man by man, and, once we had left the country, they would wipe out all the villages befriending us. However, these new menaces did not deter Mills; to return now would be taken for weakness, and would only increase the arrogance of Pangsha; consequently there would certainly be new slave-raids.

Here in Chingmei, where we rested our coolies for a few days, I often wondered how the people of these villages can live, and even enjoy life, under the constant threat of war and destruction. You would think that the fear of raids would never allow them a quiet sleep, and that every step outside the village would be haunted by the thought of an ambush. But instead of fear, the people have only a certain caution

that has become their second nature. They do not dream of going to a distant field alone, and no woman leaves the village to fetch water after dusk. The men go well-armed and in groups to the work on the fields, and sentries of young warriors see that the women are not attacked by enemies. There is no room for a free-lance in the world of the head-hunters; it is only a community that provides the necessary security and protection. Once within the large and well-protected village, danger is comparatively small, and life not very different from life in more peaceful country. Only when a village is hard pressed and the people can no longer cultivate their fields properly, food becomes scarce. But this is exceptional, for even villages at war for many generations still lead quite normal lives side by side.

To slip up is possible in this, as in every system of safeguards, and now and again it happens that a man pays for his carelessness with the loss of his head. But such misfortune creates no more fear among his fellow-villagers than the news of a traffic accident does among us. We realize the dangers of the road, and calculate how best to avoid them; so the Naga knows the danger threatening, yet does not lose his *joie de vivre*; in administered country he even wishes back the 'good old days' of head-hunting, before his country was pacified.

15

YIMPANG'S BLACK DAY

SOME weeks ago Matche, a Yimpang man, had fled to Chingmei before the wrath of Pangsha and the threats of his own fellow-villagers. For it was he who first listened to Chingmak's pleadings for an understanding with us. Once on our side, he proved very useful, informing us as to the enemy's plans, and acting as a much-needed guide in Kalyo Kengyu country.

Although Yimpang had nominally redeemed themselves for their part in the raid on Saochu and Kejok by handing over the slaves, Mills thought it would be just as well to convince them of our strength before marching against Pangsha, and so remove any desire they might harbour to attack our camp and the coolies remaining behind.

It was not far to Yimpang, and we could clearly see the village on one of the slopes to the north-east of Chingmei, as we stood looking up the valley. The path led gently upwards through fields of Jobs' tears, interspersed with a particular species of high red millet, beans, oil-seed, and tobacco. Rice grows only in small patches, and is considered such a delicacy that the successful harvester shares his crop among his friends in much the same way as he shares his much-prized meat.

The village was strongly fortified, with an inner and an outer wall. A removable bridge between the walls, led, not over an impassable water-moat, as did the bridges of mediaeval castles, but over an equally impassable ditch bristling with thorns and bamboo spikes.

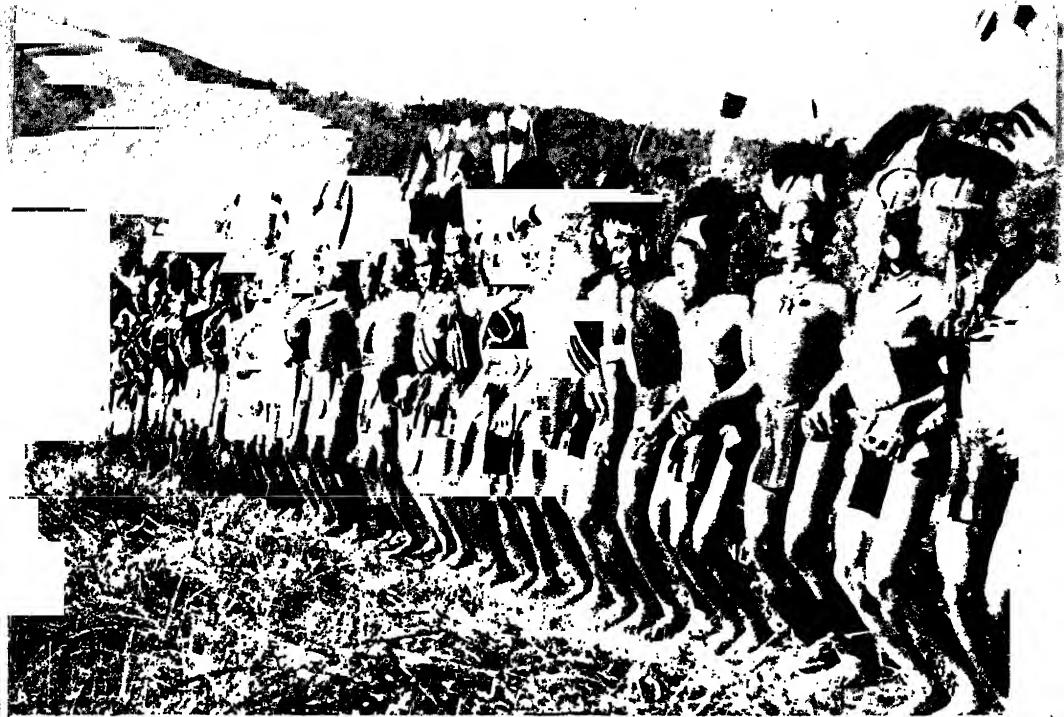
Normally Yimpang has a mixed population of Kalyo Kengyus, Changs, and Yimsungr, but Chingmak must have painted our fierceness and the punishments we would mete out pretty black, for when we arrived the whole village was deserted, or almost deserted. Only here and there a man sat with a sullen face watching us intently from the cover of

his house as we walked through the village. There was not a woman or a child to be seen ; they had all been evacuated the day before, taking with them the livestock. Perhaps it was this total lack of the usual straying pigs, goats, and cows that gave the village that particularly desolated look. Later we were told that they had devoured those animals that could not be taken away, rather than let them fall into our hands.

We were obviously not a social success in Yimpang ; even the air seemed to hang heavily round us, and Major Williams determined to try to brighten up the atmosphere with a little music. He made one of his Gurkha bag-pipers play Scottish airs on the open space in front of one of the morungs, and the strange sounds did actually draw some of the intimidated inhabitants from the shelter of their houses. It was improbable that they would acclaim this artistic performance, which might have had even greater success if the remaining Gurkhas had abandoned themselves in a Highland reel ; but they were probably soothed, for no doubt they felt that intending looters and murderers would hardly waste time in producing these ludicrous sounds.

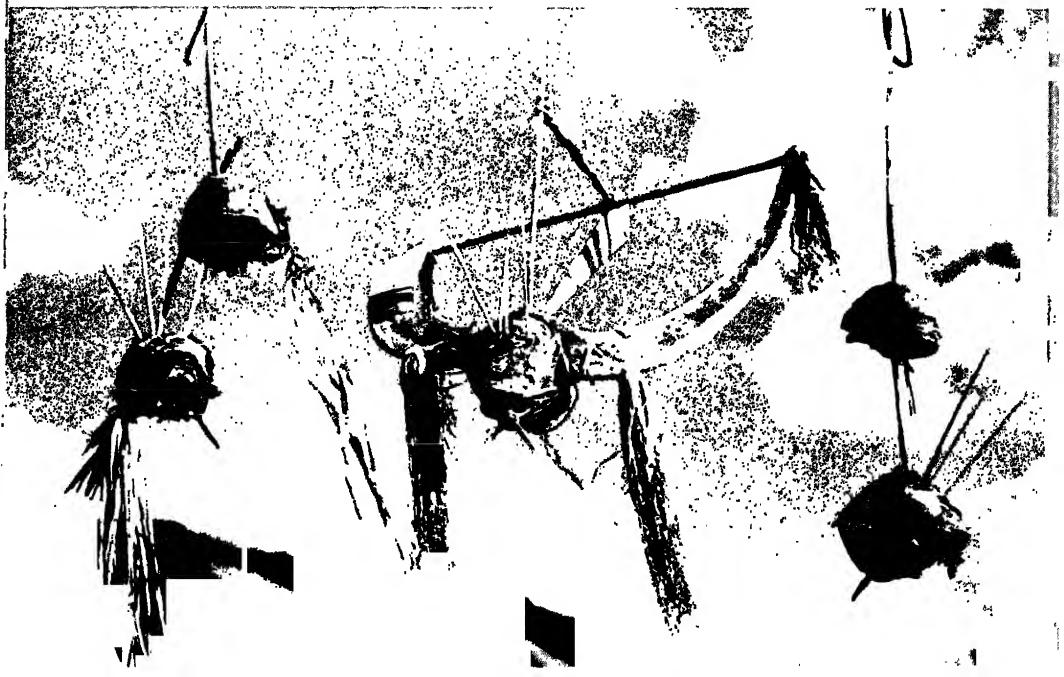
On the Saochu raid they had not hesitated ; for they had come to take heads, and they had set about their business, carrying off the trophies to their village as swiftly as possible. I shall never forget that first impression, when we suddenly came upon a tree with innumerable human heads dangling from the branches. As a matter of fact, we found, on looking closer, that they did not dangle from the branches, but leered at us from the tops of bamboo poles, leaning against the Erythrina tree.

The heads were garlanded in true Kalyo Kengyu fashion with tresses of long grass, and decorated with huge wooden horns, and in some cases with wooden models of hornbill feathers ; bamboo spikes had been stuck in the eye-sockets, for so the Nagas think to blind their victims even in death, and prevent their souls seeking out and avenging their murderers. Wind and sun had shrivelled the skin and distorted the features, and where teeth still remained they gave the gaping mouths a gruesome expression. Some of the skulls were scalped ; these belonged to men, Chingmak



20. *The Dance of the Panso Warriors*

21. *Human Heads hanging from a tree in Yimpang*



explained, for the long hair of the southern Konyaks is much prized by the Kalyo Kengyus as decoration for dance-hats, ear-ornaments, and other insignia of war, but the women are more fortunate in death, and their heads retain the short clipped hair.

As soon as I had recovered from my first astonishment, I began coveting those heads. I wanted to take them home as Museum specimens, and Mills, deciding to show his disapproval of the extermination of Saochu and Kejok by confiscating the fresh heads, furthered my idea. The heads were ordered to be cut down and taken to Chingmei.

Although Yimpang had come off very lightly, and was not as heavily hit as she might have been, since all the old heads still hung on the tree, we felt we were anything but popular; we were very conscious of the relief on the faces of our 'hosts' as we left the village with our booty.

Instead of returning directly to our camp, we followed the ridge of the mountain for a couple of hours, and then climbed up to Waoshu. This small Chang village received us with an overwhelming friendliness, tinged no doubt with relief, for they stood in deadly fear of Pangsha. They had heard of the recent raids, and had consequently strengthened their fortifications till they were almost impregnable with Naga weapons. We easily convinced them of our peaceful intentions, for they still remembered how once before other white men had come to Waoshu. Thirteen years ago J. H. Hutton crossed the ridge with a survey party, believing it to be the main range of the Patkoi, but he was bitterly disappointed on climbing the 7000 feet only to discover that the main range lay yet farther to the east.

When we returned to Chingmei, the camp was bubbling with news. Matche and the men with the heads had brought back word that a strong armed force of Kalyo Kengyu warriors from Noklak had stalked us that morning up to Yimpang. They had moved parallel with us on the hillside, and had walked into Yimpang as soon as we had left, explaining to the inhabitants that they had been ready to help if we had dared to do them any harm.



Will Noklak resist us? Will they oppose our march through their land? These are the questions that run in all our minds and form the main topic of our dinner conversation. The path over Noklak is the only way to Pangsha, and now that Chingmak's men have returned from clearing the path for to-morrow's march, bringing with them only messages of defiance from Noklak, there is not much chance of a peaceful passage.

Mills folds up the map he has been studying for a long time. Neither Noklak nor Pangsha is marked, for this map reaches only as far as Chingmei, and to-morrow we shall enter virgin country, virgin country not only for us, but also for Chingmak and his warriors, who have never dared to cross the eastern boundary of their village land.

We must travel light in hostile country, and Mills and Major Williams have decided to leave most of the provisions and kit here in the base camp. They will be safe in Chingmei, for during the last two days the coolies have been busy building a strong fort.

As we walk over to our tents from the 'mess', the pointed posts stand out in the bright light of the full moon. They are stout and firm, and if the worst comes to the worst, they could hold out for several days.

I sink on my bed with enjoyment, fancying an even greater luxury than that piece of stretched canvas can possibly warrant; who knows where we shall sleep to-morrow night?

16

INTO THE BLUE

IT is still pitch dark as Nlamo slips into my tent and puts the small hurricane lamp down by my bed. Here it stands, more urging and accusing for every extra minute I spend under the blankets. Sleep is out of the question in any case, for the intense cold has kept me awake for the last few hours. But to get out of bed into the icy air needs an effort, and I find it difficult to muster the necessary resolution.

Day has not yet broken, but the camp is alive; the coolies pack their loads and squat chatting round the fires, warming themselves and boiling their rice. Nagas will discuss the most negligible thing for hours, and now that the excitement of the tour grips the whole camp conversation is rife; looking at their eager, determined faces you would think that they were making important decisions. They are asking each other over and over again: will there be a fight? This is the question on all lips. However much I hope there will be no bloodshed, I feel deeply for the coolies. They are filled with the hope of glory, and dream of attaining the rank of head-hunters. They are desperately afraid that in the last moment we will come to terms with Pangsha, and that all the trouble and privation of the last weeks will have been in vain; for to the Naga money is no compensation for heroic exploits missed.

The coolies grasp their shields and spears; they are already prepared. It is only a matter of seconds to throw off their heavy loads and transform themselves from carriers into fully-armed warriors. Those who go with us are fervently envied by their less fortunate friends remaining behind in the camp, and yesterday mutiny had almost broken out when Mills proposed to leave one particularly eager band behind. But now there is peace again, for the would-be heroes have had their way, by solemnly promising not to harm a hair of the enemy's head without express

orders. 'We will even step over the fallen Pangsha men', they swore, 'without so much as a touch of the *dao*.'

In the dark hut we shiver over our breakfast, waiting for the first rays of the sun to grope slowly down the hillside—in several minutes they reach Chingmei, and then, as the palisade of our camp casts its first bizarre shadows, our column begins to move.

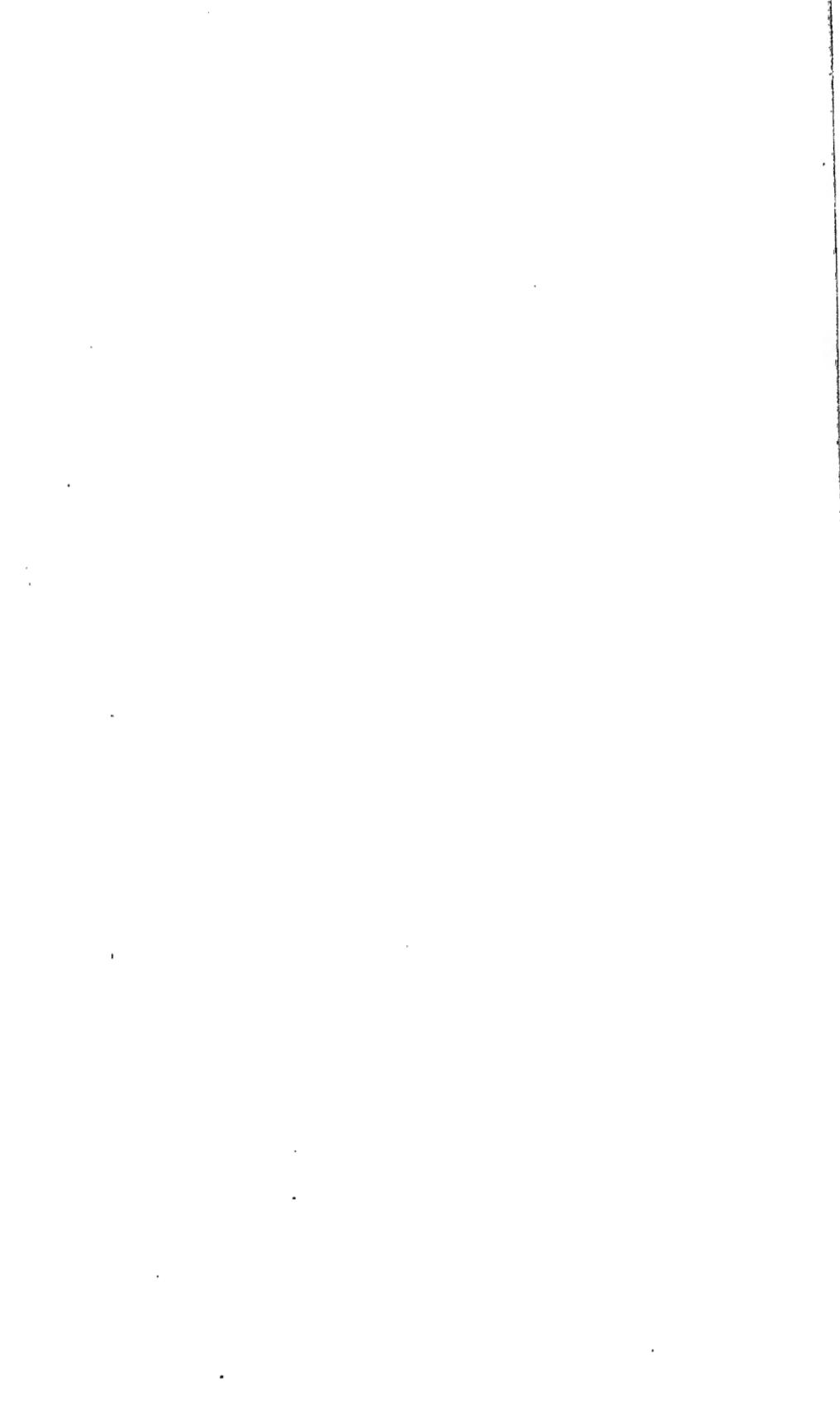
The six Chingmei men, acting as scouts, go ahead. They are pleased to accompany us, rather for the love of adventure than for the promised reward. The picked warriors of a warlike village—and their rich tattoo and ornaments tell of many victories—they seem dangerous men indeed. But to-day they have a strange appearance, for we have tied white bandages round their heads and chests, and they look as if they had come from, rather than were hopefully advancing to, battle. The bandages are marks of identification, for we are afraid lest our Chang scouts be taken for enemies in the confusion of the fight. Their leader is Chingmak's son; he is not yet twenty-five, but he is already a famous warrior and has captured eight heads.

The scouts are to help us find the way to Pangsha and to circumvent the obstacles awaiting us in hostile country. Nagas are expert in all sorts of tricks that complicate the passage of an unwelcome guest. They run strings through the dense grass of the paths, and a touch of the foot releases a poisoned arrow that pierces you in the ribs. They are fond of sowing a pit with large spiked poles, covering it over with a thin grating and dry leaves, so that an unwary step precipitates the victim and he is impaled on the spikes at the bottom of the pit. A dangerous but favourite device consists in the small bamboo spikes—'panjis' they call them—with which the Nagas sow the ground, to spike the feet of the approaching enemy.

For the first hours of the way, however, we are in friendly country, and there is no need for caution. Steeply we climb from the camp into the valley. It is still bitterly cold, and we grudge the loss of so much height; now, early in the morning, we would gladly climb up-hill, but, as it is, we



22. Chingmak's son (left) and another Chang warrior



shall probably have to climb the treeless slope opposite under a midday sun.

Deep down in the valley a brook rushes over huge blocks of stone. The water is clear, and looks horribly cold. Looking down, we fervently hope that we will not have to start the day by wading across, but this time we are spared, for as we come to the stream we see that a large tree lies across the water, and our coolies scamper over like monkeys.

Now the path leads up from the valley over a precipitous slope, and soon loses itself in jungle. For many years Noklak has been at war with Chingmei, and it is not surprising that the path is completely overgrown. The scouts at the head of the column cut their way through the thicket with strong dao blows; this kind of travelling is a slow business, and you require great patience as the column moves forward only step by step.

Here and there huge patches of blue flowers cover the shadowy floor of the forest. It is the wild indigo that grows where the sun hardly ever penetrates, and it is from these leaves that the Naga make the dye for their blue cloths.

As the forest recedes, a stony slope unrolls before us. It is torn by deep ravines, and even the light steps of our scouts crumble the surface and send broken bits clattering into the depths. What will happen to our heavily-loaded coolies? But my anxiety for the Nagas, as so often before, proves unnecessary; in half an hour all the loads are across.

Now once more the path leads through the forest. As we pass under the first trees there are excited shouts from the head of the column. 'Beware panjis!' the warning comes back. Now there is no doubt; we are in hostile country, for the bamboo spikes set in the path are freshly pointed, and obviously intended for our feet.

The column moves yet more slowly, feeling its way through the thick undergrowth, but all this caution is not enough, and soon there is an angry cry. One of the Chang scouts stands on one leg, with a panji sticking through his other foot, the bloody point jutting out some way above the toes.

'Silly of me, to step on a panji', is all the man says, as

they draw the spike out of his foot, and as soon as the wound is dressed with one of the hitherto decorative bandages, he insists on rejoining his friends at the head of the column. A Gurkha is the next victim. A panji pierces the muscles of his calf, but he, too, makes light of his misfortune. How stoic these people are!

The sun burns down on the hillside, and the air stagnates between the dense bushes. We would like to rest and eat, but we dare not waste precious time; we are not certain how long it will take us to get to Noklak, nor how we shall be received, and two clear hours must be left before dusk, in which to build a fortified camp.

Round every bend we expect the village to come in sight, but time after time we are disappointed, until at last we see Noklak lying about two miles away on a broad spur. It is in a splendid position on our right, dominating the head of the valley, where the mountains, widening out, give way to an unhampered view of the main range of the Patkoi.

But the ground that lies between us and the village is difficult to negotiate. High bushes cover the slopes, and once among them our vision will be blocked. Carefully we search the country with our glasses, and eventually pick out a group of men in the long grass near the village. They are coming slowly towards us. Noklak has certainly been warned of our approach, and their sentries have probably been watching us for a long time as we made our way along the hills. According to old Naga tactics, other warriors should lie already in an ambush above the path.

The sepoys level their rifles ready to fire. I feel in the pocket for my revolver and load both barrels of my gun. Step by step we move through the thicket. You cannot see more than six yards ahead—the back of the man in front and a few heads of the men farther ahead—and to the left and to the right nothing but grass, reed, and bushes. A wall impenetrable to the eye, but not so impenetrable, I think, for those famous poisoned arrows.

Involuntarily the fate of that other punitive expedition against the Konyak village of Chinglong creeps into my mind, when the Chinglong warriors broke through the

thicket along the whole length of the column, cutting off the heads of the coolies and sepoys before they had time to defend themselves, and then disappeared into the jungle on the other side of the path. To-day we realize the danger, but the knowledge is not very comforting.

The tension grows with every slowly passing minute. Still I can see nothing but the brown, crackling bush and the deep blue of the sky overhead. Any moment a spear may whistle out of the thicket. How fervently I wish that the enemy were before us—for peace or for war!

Action would be a relief—even a clash. But no, this is against all better judgement; Noklak had no hand in the slave raids of the last months, and it would be awkward to leave a hostile village at our backs, while we marched against Pangsha.

Quite suddenly the path opens out into a clearing and our presumed enemies stand before us, still far away, but clearly visible as they brandish their spears and daos. Shall we fire? The panjis that blocked our way leave us in no doubt as to their hostile intentions; we might have to pay dearly for a hand-to-hand fight in the jungle. On the other hand, their obviously troubled behaviour seems to point to uncertainty. We halt. Surely they see that there are many of us. Yes, there is a movement in the crowd, and three men separate themselves from the others. What are they calling to us? Only Chingmak can understand. Where is Chingmak? He is in the centre of the column with the coolies, but now he comes forward, as once more the faint call comes up to us.

‘They ask if we want peace or war,’ translates Chingmak ‘and look now, they are breaking branches—they wave them over their heads. That means peace.’

The opinion of the old men seems to have triumphed over the young hotspurs, and Chingmak makes haste to answer, ‘Ho-o, ho-o, peace, peace! Come here’; and his powerful voice carries far through the breathless stillness.

Soon the three old men approach, mistrustfully, eyeing the bayonets of the sepoys, pointed so obviously in their direction. These men are the first real Kalyo Kengyus I have

seen, and even at a glance one can see a great difference between them and the Changs of Chingmei. Their heads are rounder, their features more mongoloid, and a small dark-blue cloth, tied in some peculiar way round the body, leaves the breast nearly bare. They are richly tattooed, with a large ostrich-feather ornament and groupings of suns and small human figures, all doubtless symbols of captured heads. The small apron is embroidered with cowries. Through how many hands must these shells have passed while making the long journey from the sea to these mountains?

The negotiators are obviously nervous, and their astonished gaze wanders from one to the other of these four white men, but their faces lighten as they recognize Chingmak, and the time-long adversaries greet each other as old friends, and soon squat chatting cheerfully on the ground before us.

As a rule there exists little personal hate between the individuals of two hostile Naga villages. War is a sport, and no one is blamed if now and then a head is brought home. The opponents are quite unembarrassed when they meet on neutral ground, and are often to be seen drinking a mug of rice-beer together in the most friendly fashion.

Not so long ago the young warriors of Noklak plotted to take a head from Chingmei, but the inglorious results only caused much laughter in Chingmak's house, and the warriors returned sorrowfully home. It appears that three Noklak warriors, seeing a solitary Chingmei man enter his field-house, decided it was too good a chance to miss; the unsuspecting man lit a fire to warm his food, but hearing a frog croak in the nearby brook, and eager to secure such an unexpected dainty, slipped out of the back door unseen. Meanwhile the Noklak warriors crept cautiously through the millet. Reaching the field-house, and thinking the victim still inside, they divided; two guarded the back door with raised spears, the third entering by the front found the house empty; imagining his prey escaping he rushed through the back door, only to receive a spear in his stomach. Too late did his friends realize their mistake, and they had to carry his body instead of an enemy's head

back to Noklak. No wonder the people of Chingmei laughed over this joke, and the Chingmei man blessed the little frog that had croaked in the brook.

To-day Chingmak and the men from Noklak do not think of such old stories, for there are more important things to talk of. It soon comes out that Noklak wants to fight as little as we, and that they placed obstacles in our path only from fear of Pangsha's wrath. Now they beg us not to enter the village, for Pangsha would be bound to deduce a friendly welcome and would take dreadful revenge.

Since it does not really matter whether we visit Noklak now or on our way back, we instruct Chingmak to agree, but to demand a fine in the shape of pigs and goats as compensation for the damage done by their panjis. When there are two hundred coolies and sepoys to feed, such fines can be extremely useful. We find quite a good place for our camp, near a stream and the ever-important bamboos; with them close at hand the sepoys and coolies can build a fence and rows of small huts in just about two hours.

Space in camp is always limited, but to-day we are particularly cramped, and with the increasing darkness it becomes more and more difficult to move between the tents, the huts, and the open fires. It is still worse when the coolies begin to slaughter pigs, and after cutting them open, to singe them over the fires. The whole air reeks of the pungent smell of burnt pigs' bristles, and the whole of the ground is strewn with intestines that in the darkness get entangled in your feet as you pad through the camp.

Next to the shelter that we euphemistically call the 'mess', our scouts have settled down round a fire. Somehow or other they have contrived to procure a whole pig as their ration, and now with refreshing thoroughness, they begin to devour it. Even the man with the pierced foot refuses to allow his small misfortune to spoil his meal. While we eat our own dinner, we cannot agree amongst ourselves whether they will or will not be able completely to consume that tasty animal. But at ten o'clock, as I stand outside my tent and notice that the good fellows, after a

short sleep, have begun to eat again, my doubts vanish. I am certain of the eventual disappearance of that pig and I am certain, too, that on this night at least our scouts will not suffer from 'night starvation'. And I am right, for in the morning, as they swallow the pieces of meat they have saved for their breakfast rice, the whole pig is finished, and only the picked bones bear witness to the feast.

The sun rises radiantly over the high ranges of the Patkoi. Ahead lies only a mysterious blue wall, the jagged line of the peaks separating the delicate blue of the sky from the deeper blue of the hills. The western slopes still lie in shadow, and the sun shines through the fine morning mist which hangs over the valley like a gossamer veil.

It is already late, and we cannot wait to watch the lifting of the veil—to see the woods on the far slopes take shape as the morning advances—for we must follow the path to Noklak. It is well-trodden, and when it reaches the village it runs between the two 'khels' into which so many Naga villages are divided, and then it leads on eastwards towards Pangsha. There is a sentry-box in the top of a large tree that stands strangely outside the palisade overlooking the entrance to the village, the sentry evidently gaining access by a long bamboo ladder that hangs down on the inner side of the palisade.

Looking at the houses of Noklak, there is little doubt that we have left the land of the Changs and are now in the country of quite another people. Dark grey slates cover the flat roofs of the small houses, standing close together and side by side. We are among the Kalyo Kengyus, the legendary 'stone-house dwellers'. No other tribe inhabiting the mountains of Assam and Burma cover their roofs with slate.

Kalyo Kengyus, 'stone-house people', the other Nagas call the tribes living on the western slopes of the Patkoi. How far their land extends to the east it is still impossible to say. Are they a homogeneous people like the Changs? Do they consist of many different tribes, with different languages and different cultures? The answer to all these questions can only be found in the future, when the country is finally

surveyed and its people become the subject of further observation.

In the south the land of the Kalyo Kengyus borders on the land of the Southern Sangtams, and it was here that J. H. Hutton visited several of their villages when he went with a Survey Party towards Saramati, the highest and still-unconquered peak of the Patkoi Range. But a large area extends between Noklak and these Southern Sangtam villages, and it is here that the map shows the white of unknown country.

Leaving Noklak behind, we follow a good and apparently much-used path, leading along the open slopes towards the north-east. Noklak and Pangsha are close friends, and Chingmak tells us, as we go, how yesterday the Pangsha men had been in Noklak to find out 'how the thing smelt'. There are fresh tracks in the damp places on the path, of men coming and going; no doubt they are the tracks of the Pangsha men. Nagas are always full of gossip, and this morning the elders of Noklak had confided to Chingmak that the slave-girl was still in Pangsha, but that without adequate compensation her owner refused to part with her.

Small herds of mithan, belonging partly to Noklak and partly to Pangsha, graze on the grass-covered slopes. They are magnificent animals that take no notice of our approach; not so much as a head is lifted as we pass; they are much more interested in the grass, moist from the night's dew.

It is not long before we leave this open slope and find ourselves in low bush-land. Visibility becomes bad, and as it continues to grow worse, Major Williams sends flank patrols to protect the long line of our coolies. Soon the path is running between walls of thick bushes, prickly creepers, and strong, dry reeds; the pace is infuriatingly slow, for once more we have to cut our way step by step. Just here, where the thicket is densest, we hear calls coming from the hill-tops; they come from somewhere directly above us, but we cannot see anything. Perhaps Pangsha's sentries have sighted us, and are calling warnings to each other. It is not pleasant to have our coming announced in such an audible fashion, remaining ourselves blind, so to speak, to the

enemy; and Mills decides that the rearguard shall burn the jungle behind us on both sides of the path, so that we shall have no difficulties on the way back. It seems a good idea, but hardly do we hear the crackle and catch a glimpse of the flames drawing out along the slope, before a light wind springs up and drives the flames close on our heels. This forces us to abandon the manoeuvre; to be caught between burning jungle and hostile forces might be rather unpleasant.

It is five hours since we left Noklak, and the sun stands high in the sky, when suddenly we come out on to an open hill and see before us the unknown and much-dreaded land; beyond the Langnyu valley at our feet, steep slopes sweep up to wooded ranges, and behind these peaks towers yet another rocky ridge—the main range of the Patkoi. We have no way of measuring their height, but we are already more than 6000 feet above sea-level, and they must be nearer 11,000 feet. When eventually this area is surveyed, the border between Assam and Burma will probably run along these mountains.

On the gentle slopes on the opposite side of the valley the sun shines on gold roofs. Is this Pangsha that lies so peacefully over ripening rice-fields? Matche, whom we have persuaded to act as our guide, is the only man of our whole column who has ever seen this country. Yes, he says, these houses belong to Pangsha, but the main part of the village lies hidden in a hollow, and these hundred or so houses on the shoulder of the mountain are only Pangsha's colony. Inconspicuously the settlement lies above the valley, and it is hard to believe that it holds the whole of the surrounding country in a grip of terror.

With Pangsha in sight, we feel that it will not be long before we learn with which particular strategy Pangsha has decided to ensnare us. Matche has told us of Pangsha's intentions, for apparently they had boasted of their plans in Yimpang. Either to meet us on the path with many salaams, and, putting us off our guard, trap us in an ambush, or to allow us to enter their village, overwhelming us with every sign of friendship, and then, as we leave, and least

expect it, to fall on us, counting on our confusion and their superior numbers.

So Pangsha is counting on catching us unawares, and when we hear far-away calls and make out the figures of three men with a conspicuously white goat, we are very much on our guard; they are coming towards us over the open hillside, but we do not in the least trust the peace that the goat appears to offer, and carefully sweep the valley with our field-glasses.

‘Do you see there, down by the river? Something moves! Yes—there are men down there—many men! ’

Something glints in the sun, and then is lost to the naked eye, but it is enough to rouse our fears, and we rake every inch of that valley patiently with our field-glasses, until, triumphantly, we pick out hundreds of fully-armed warriors streaming over the river. It must have been their spear-points that caught the sun.

Swiftly they disappear in the wood close to the ford, where the path runs on to the village. Will they appear again? If they mean to meet us in the open, it should not take long for them to make their way up to the large clearing on the slope. We wait a long time, but nothing stirs, only the peace envoys come nearer on the hillside. Gradually our doubts vanish: Pangsha have certainly taken up their places for an ambush!

The calls of the envoys again ring to and fro. It is a riddle to me how they can make out the shouting at this distance, but Chingmak has understood, and explains that the Pangsha men want to talk to us. Mills tells him to assure them a safe-conduct and ask them to meet us half-way. They seem to understand his answer, for almost immediately they begin to move upwards, and we plunge into the jungle once more. It is not long before our advance-guard meets the Pangsha men, and escorts them to Mills. It is a peculiar feeling to have the enemy before us at last, or rather the envoys of the enemy. They are not imposing figures, though they are probably the most important members of the village, these three middle-aged and one old man; rather short and insignificantly dressed in faded

cloths, they compare unfavourably with our magnificently ornamented Chang scouts. Yet their features betray a little of that energy and cold-bloodedness that have made them the dreaded overlords of the whole district. One of them leads a goat on a string, and another carries a chicken in a small basket.

Where is Matche? We need him now as interpreter, but he is not to be found. Afraid of the revenge of Pangsha, he is hiding himself at the farthest end of the column, but Chingmak fills in the gap; he speaks Kalyo Kengyu tolerably well, and the conversation is carried on through him and our Chang dobashi.

Mistrustingly the Pangsha men glance at the bayonets of the sepoys, but Mills reassures them, saying they are 'Lambus', sacrosanct negotiators, and need have no fear. The message they bring seems astonishingly friendly. The goat is a present of welcome from Pangsha, who are greatly pleased at our visit. They will treat us as elder brothers—no, as their own fathers. Never have they thought of fighting against us, for peace and friendship have always been their only wish.

It sounds all very gratifying—all too gratifying, perhaps—and Mills replies that we, too, are anxious for peace, and only seek the captured girl from Saochu.

At this the ambassadors pull long faces, for it is just this slave-girl that they cannot give us—she has been sold a long time ago far over the mountains to the East.

Can it be true? Did not the Noklak people tell Chingmak that yesterday the girl was still in Pangsha? But the ambassadors deny this; they say they did not visit Noklak yesterday. The raids on Saochu and Kejok—yes, they raided the two villages—but there is no need to quarrel over a few captured heads. To our questions why they have so far now sent us insulting challenges and threatened all the villages who befriended us with destruction, they only produce all sorts of completely inadequate excuses.

They are most surprised, now that Mills is sending them back with their goat, the small squawking chicken, and the

message that without the slave-girl no understanding is possible and that their stubbornness and all their threats will be punished by the burning of their village.

This is a declaration of war.

If Matche had not betrayed Pangsha's plan, we might have been deceived for a while by their apparent friendliness, and would probably have fallen into the ambush; but now we avoid the obvious path, and climb straight down the steep mountain to the river, and thus succeed in foiling Pangsha's first plan.

In the broad basin of the valley we are safe from surprise attacks, and we make our way without further obstacles to where, just below the main village, we find a natural island in the middle of the river, which presents a most favourable camping-ground.

Soon the coolies are hard at work bringing in bamboos to build the palisade and the huts, while a group of Pangsha men sit above on a little hill watching our every movement. Suddenly one springs up. What can he have seen? To our horror, we notice that some of our coolies have ventured too far, and are unsuspectingly cutting bamboos just beneath the outlook of the enemy. We cannot warn them in time, for the rushing of the mountain stream deadens our voices. If the Pangsha men run down the hill it is only a moment's work for them to hold a coolie's head in their hands. Quickly Major Williams orders the slope to be covered. Already several men, whirling their spears, run down the narrow path. A command, a salvo—two men fall, but they pick themselves up and disappear into the thicket.

No other coolie leaves the safety of the camp that evening.

Night falls, and with the dwindling of daylight dwindles the advantage of our rifles. How lucky that Nagas will seldom attack in the dark, but usually wait until the grey light of dawn increases visibility, for it would be an easy matter to ply our camp with their famous poisoned arrows from the safety of the river-bank. During dinner we discuss the possibility of an arrow piercing the canvas of our tents, and Mills thinks that to be quite safe I would have to sleep

under my camp-bed. Even the insured safety does not lure me into such utter discomfort; we have an exhausting day behind us, and a few minutes after my head touches the pillow I know nothing more of poisoned arrows or head-hunters for seven hours.

PANGSHA BURNS

PANGSHA has allowed us a peaceful night's sleep, and we are grateful for such consideration as once more we break camp before the sun rises. A few of the sepoys are to remain with the luggage, while the rest, with the coolies, fully armed, climb with us up to the village. The Pangsha men shout challenges from the top of the hill, but they are always careful to stay out of range of our rifles. Once more we are grateful to them, as once more they miss their chance of attack; on the narrow path leading steeply up to the village through scrubland, the result of a fight would be dubious. But the danger passes as we reach the open heights of the hills.

Climbing we speculate—will Pangsha try to defend their village? A few figures move among the bamboo bushes before the houses, but as we come nearer they disappear, to the intense disappointment of our coolies, who really think their hour has come and are burning for the glory of a fight.

While all other Naga villages are strongly fortified, Pangsha, resting on the laurels of her invincibility, lies comparatively unprotected; there is no one in the whole country round who would dare to wage war against Pangsha.

The village is divided into three 'khels', one of which stands apart, separated from the rest of the village by a deep ravine filled with jungle. Well over five hundred houses lie between gardens and huge banana trees. The inhabitants have succeeded in removing most of the movable goods into safety, and only the obstinate and immovable pigs, with an occasional goat or cow, stray about the village in the light of the morning sun. Until yesterday, the Pangsha men must have trusted entirely to their strategy, never thinking we would reach their village, or they would certainly have hidden their animals somewhere in the woods.

Mills and Williams, taking up a position between the three

‘ khels’, direct all further operations, and since the village is doomed, our coolies and scouts beg for permission to loot. Jubilantly they throw themselves on the deserted streets, on the empty, fated houses. A spear flies through the air and hits a squeaking pig; the head of a cow falls under the mighty stroke of a dao; the last pieces of furniture are brought out of the houses, and one or two forgotten ornaments. Even Chingmak, generally so dignified and calm, I see venting his furious rage on a perfectly innocent rice-basket, slashing it from end to end. In his boldest dreams he had probably never dared to hope that he would one day plunder the almighty Pangsha.

I cannot stand calmly by Mills and Williams and see all this wonderful ethnographical material passing before my eyes. And despite Nlamo’s anxiety, for he is certain that there are still enemies lurking somewhere, I join the coolies in their search of the houses and the remains of the village possessions.

The houses are built of bamboo; they are rather small, and, now that the fires have gone out, quite dark and difficult to search. Here the roofs are not slate-covered but thatched with palm-leaves, like the houses of the Konyaks. At the end of one of the ‘ khels’ stands a house, larger than the others, which must certainly be a morung. It has a high pointed gable and a carved main-post; and a little distance away a huge wooden drum lies in the open. But the drum is not like the drums of the Konyaks: it has a peculiar form, tubular and open on both sides, and is overshadowed by a low tree, hung with whole bundles of heads, many of which are still partly covered with skin and hair and are apparently trophies of the latest raid.

All these heads convince me that we do no wrong to Pangsha in plundering the village, for what, after all, is the plundering of an evacuated village to the massacre of Saochu and Kejok? For every pig our coolies spear to-day, five human heads at least can be reckoned on that infamous raid.

Hurriedly I take a few photographs of this village that I see in its present form for the first and last time; a section



23. *In unexplored country: the main range of the Patkoi*

24. *Men's Houses in the Kalyo-Kengyu village of Pangsha*



of the sepoys and several coolies are setting a light to the third 'khel', and already I can see the flames licking the roofs and springing from house to house. In a few minutes a great fire blazes and a broad column of smoke climbs into the sky.

In the upper 'khel' Smith and some of the coolies round up a few Pangsha men hiding among the farthest houses, but they flee into the jungle, and then he too sets a light to the dry palm-leaf roofs.

From every side come sounds of explosions—the detonations of burning bamboo poles; the crackling and rattling grow into a wild roar, and the ash, carried high into the sky by the clouds of smoke, falls again as the fumes disperse, covering us with little grey flecks like flakes in a snowstorm. Clouds of smoke darken the sun, and the light round the village changes to a ghastly reddish violet. It is an unreal and theatrical play of light that, in the midst of the friendly, sunny day, pours out fantastic colours in eccentric patches over the landscape. Our primitive instincts sometimes take pleasure in works of destruction, and these last hours of Pangsha's ruin hold us with a certain fascination.

We do not realize that the clouds of smoke are seen far over the land, and in distant villages the people sing and dance, rejoicing in Pangsha's defeat.

Since it is impossible to follow the inhabitants into the woods and hunt for the slave-girl, there is little we can do for the moment in Pangsha, and Mills and Williams decide to withdraw to the camp. But first the lower 'khel' must be set alight, and a few of the coolies are detailed off for the job, before joining us in the camp. Waiting until we see the flames take hold of the houses in this 'khel' too, we climb slowly down the hill to our camp and our lunch.

We are incredibly hungry and we throw ourselves on the contents of several tins, and then—I suddenly miss Nlamo. I sent him with the coolies to set fire to the lower 'khel', thinking that it would be a good opportunity to add to my collection of trophies, and told him to cut a few heads off the tree. He should have rejoined the column with the coolies, but he is nowhere to be seen. Now Nakhu, our

Chang dobashi, comes to us in great excitement. Nlamo and two Lhota coolies were last seen in the burning village.

‘They are lost!’ gasps Nakhu. ‘Chingmak was at the end of the column, he heard the voices of the Pangsha men crying from the hill to their own people, “Cut them off, cut them off”. But Chingmak did not know that Nlamo was still behind him, and did not take any notice.’

‘My God! Then the Pangsha men have got Nlamo!’

‘If he really was seen with the two other Lhota boys staying behind in the village, I am afraid they must have.’

‘But this is ghastly—can’t we really do anything?’

‘I’m afraid not. We have been a quarter of an hour in the camp already, and it would be at least another half an hour before we reached the village again; by that time I am afraid the three will have long lost their heads. Perhaps, though, they are only lingering on the way, and will soon turn up.’

I feel quite sick, as though the blood has left my body; never have I seen Mills so pale. Now Nlamo is lost, and all for those stupid heads. And it is all my fault. But for me, he would still be in Kohima. I seem to see his brown body already without its head. How dreadful that moment must have been when he suddenly found himself alone amongst enemies! Why in the devil’s name did he stay so long in the village? Didn’t he hear the order to withdraw? It is true, he carried my gun, and he is not a bad shot; strange that we did not hear anything.

Anxious moments go by as we stand about, perplexed and helpless, at the thought that Nlamo’s head and those of the two Lhota boys have long been in the hands of Pangsha.

Suddenly we see men running down the path through the burning grass we had set light behind us. They are the missing boys, who finally reach the camp completely exhausted and covered in sweat.

Little by little we drag from Nlamo the story of how, after he and the two Lhota boys had cut the heads from the tree, they had not followed the coolies, but thinking that we would still be in our position between the two ‘khels’, had returned there through the burning village. In the

distance he had seen some men, whom he took for our coolies, but as he saw no signs of us, he had started with the two Lhotas on his own way back to the camp. Hardly had he left the village, however, when again men appeared in the smoke, but this time quite close, and, to his terror, he recognized Pangsha men. He seized the gun and fired. The men coming towards him suddenly turned and fled. Luckily the smoke made it impossible to see that Nlamo was alone, and naturally they did not realize that the three Lhota boys were separated from the column; they probably thought we were all still in the village, and were just as terrified as Nlamo, who dropped the heads, and incidentally my electric exposure meter, which he always carried, and ran for his life.

We sit down again to our interrupted meal with light hearts, and enjoy the so-far-disdained tins with relish. But we cannot rest long, for Pangsha's colony on the shoulder of the mountain is four miles away, and it must also be burnt to the ground. Mills thinks that it will be an easy march along the basin of the valley, and that we will be able to climb up to the colony before evening, returning to Noklak by the light of the full moon.

Quite frankly, I am horrified at this programme; I feel we have already had quite enough trouble and excitement for one day. However, Mills is determined, and we start at about three o'clock down the valley, though not for long on the comfortable march Mills has promised us; all too soon the broad valley narrows and, to our great disappointment, the river changes from a gentle stream to a swift-running torrent; in some places it rushes between steep cliffs, and to make any progress we must wade downstream in the icy water or scramble over the precipitous banks through a tangle of jungle.

It is the worst march of the whole tour, and we soon give up the thought of reaching Pangsha's colony that evening. The sun is already sinking before we find a flat place in the bend of the river for our camp. Water flows on two sides, and towards the mountains the sepoy's erect a palisade of quickly-felled bamboos. The mist gathers over the river,

intensifying the cold, and the camp-fires provide only a very inadequate warmth.

There is a full moon to-night, which, shedding a cold, clear light, silvers the earth and heightens the bewitching unattainability of the high mountains behind Pangsha.

Since it seems senseless to carry our luggage up to the mountain, when a small force is enough to fire the village, Mills decides to send the coolies, protected by half our escort, back to Noklak early to-morrow morning. The long line of the coolies will move as ostentatiously as possible along the open clearings on the opposite hills, while we attack Pangsha's colony with forty rifles.

THE FIGHT WITH THE HEAD-HUNTERS

ONCE more, as the first grey of dawn lightens the sky, we break camp. The coolies with the luggage set off for Noklak under a strong escort of sepoys, and we, with forty sepoys, several dobashis, and our Chang scouts, climb the hill to Pangsha's colony. We intend to surprise the inhabitants, and if possible to take a few prisoners; this might interest Pangsha to negotiate an exchange for the slave-girl. The burning of the main village had only been partly successful, for as Nakhu said last night: 'The houses are burnt, but Pangsha has still all her teeth'. He meant, of course, that the warriors were untried and, having suffered no losses, their courage was yet unbent.

The path leads through fields already reaped of rice, but the giant millet growing in between the cut stalks stands yet in ears. It is amazingly high, this giant millet, standing well over ten feet, and affords us excellent cover; as long as the slope lies in the shadow we approach unnoticed. Quite close to the village we have to cross an open clearing, and this is the moment the sun chooses to rise over the ridge of the mountains, shining full in our faces. This morning the sun befriends the Pangsha people, for in the first dazzling blaze, their sentries suddenly catch sight of the enemy so near the gates, and immediately a long-drawn cry comes from the village; a cry that is echoed all over the valley and relayed along the ridge in the direction of the main village. There must be Pangsha scouts sown over every yard of the mountain.

A stone wall blocks the pathway where it leads over a narrow shoulder, but it is not defended, and the small holes that should be filled with cross-bow arrows are unmanned. It is a matter of moments and a few pushes, and the stones give way under our weight; the inner side is reinforced with banana stalks, and we are surprised, for it is difficult to

understand how the Naga belief that banana stalks 'cool' bullets and render them harmless can have found its way to Pangsha.

We enter the village, and even at the first glance realize that it is deserted; the people must have taken to their heels without so much as a thought for anything but their personal safety. Before the village stands a huge log drum and, near by, an *Erythrina* tree, where the trophies of Pangsha's victories hang. I am quite accustomed by now to the sight of human heads with skin and hair, more or less decomposed, but the sight of the not quite disintegrated leg of a child about three years old, that hangs among the other trophies, fills me with a furious disgust and an indignation not in any way mitigated by 'scientific interest'. When we found the decorated trophies in Yimpang, and even the bundles of recently captured heads in the main village of Pangsha, I was filled with curiosity and a certain detached excitement, but this small child's leg made my blood boil with rage. Each one of us sees the foot, but no word passes; we can only revenge this child, and the hope of liberating that other small girl still in Pangsha's grip is very remote.

Smoke still rises from the hearths of the houses, and the inhabitants must have dropped everything and run for their lives, for everything was as if they had just left the village to work on the fields. Not so much as a piece of household furniture have they taken with them; incidentally we notice it is much poorer than the Konyaks, and the few textiles we find are pieces of a rough stuff woven from bark fibre. Only an upturned cooking-pot, or a stream of rice-beer from a mug knocked over in the hurry, betrays the true circumstances of the flight. Here and there under the bamboo beds ashes still glow, almost dead after their long night's task of keeping the sleeper warm. Matche tells us that according to a peculiar custom girls put glowing ash under their beds as a sign that their lovers may share it with them.

It is a pity that the beautiful carved posts of the men's house must be sacrificed to the fire, but to-day the regret of the ethnologist at the destruction of such works of art must

once more give way; our dobashis are already running from house to house with flaming torches, and soon the flames seize the dry roofs; it is not long before Pangsha's colony is nothing more than a smoking ruin.

Since Nlamo, now on his way to Noklak with the coolies, failed yesterday to bring the heads into camp, I determine to try my luck with the trophies of Pangsha's colony. Quickly I cut four heads from the head-tree and pack them into a carrying-basket that I manage to save from destruction; but to have the heads all ready packed and to have them conveyed to Noklak are two quite different things. Not one of the sepoys, the dobashis, or the Chang scouts will so much as touch the basket; so, if I am not to fail again in securing my specimens, there is little else to do but to take it on my own shoulders. With great difficulty I hoist the gruesome booty on my back, much to the amusement of the Nagas and the slightly shocked surprise of the sepoys.

Feeling that the chapter of Pangsha's punishment is closed for the time being, we follow the path running along the edge of the ridge that falls steeply away into the valley. The main village is down there in the hollow on our right. Good God! There are unbroken chains of fully-armed warriors streaming along the path leading from the village, and our eye, following the path up the hillside, discovers that it runs along the mountain half-way up, and eventually crosses our path at right angles. In spite of their spears and their heavy shields, the warriors run with frightening swiftness, and although they are still a great distance away, and appear only as tiny figures, yet there is something extremely expressive in their movements. Is it their firm determination this time to fight to the death? Their hoarse war-cries resound through the air; there is nothing tentative about them, and we are left in little doubt as to the business in hand.

It seems that at last we shall come to blows with Pangsha. To-day they will learn that a real fight does not in any way resemble the massacre of women and children they perpetrated on Saochu.

But Williams and Mills take a much more serious view of the situation.

‘Of course Pangsha will try to cut us off from the river. If they attack in the jungle, the result might be nasty for us. Look there! More and more men are pouring out of the wood—there must be at least six hundred of them.’

Six hundred of them! We take stock of our fifty odd men.

‘If we continue on this path, we couldn’t reach the river before them. We must go down this precipice—and as quickly as possible.’

Every man turns where he stands and leaves the path to run down the slope, which, falling steeply away, is almost completely covered with fields. There is no way through, but we run at random through the fields of giant millet as fast as our legs will carry us. The unrelenting and elastic stalks break back and hit me in the face, and every few minutes they seem, in some exasperating way, to get entangled in the basket on my back.

We reach the crossing of the path to the village half-way up the hill; there is no time to find out where the enemy are, but we hear them coming up the path, and any moment they will turn the bend of the hill. The way to the river is free. We have only to run straight, almost perpendicularly down. But, for that free passage, we have paid a high price; the enemy now have an enormous advantage, they are above us, and we hear their war-cries coming nearer.

We run on through the millet-fields, with the soft earth giving way under our steps; more than once I slip and fall, for it is not easy to run through that forest of millet with a camera and a gun and the uncomfortable basket on my back. This encounter with Pangsha is not exactly as I had imagined it; there is no denying it, we are running away.

But who wanted to deny it? If only I could run quicker! The others were surely running faster? There is Smith in front, and there a sepoy. If only we could stick together! This damned millet! You can see nothing at all: hardly more than ten yards ahead. A Chingmei scout passes me. He has dropped every piece of his precious loot from Pangsha and is running for his life. He probably thinks that we have not the slightest chance against this ten-fold strength.

Behind us the war-cries swell urgently to a roar that I am never likely to forget. They sound hardly human, these passionate, terrifying cries that rise from hundreds of throats. What use are the guns in your hands when you cannot even sight your target in this confounded millet? We hear the enemy, but we will only see him when bullets can no longer prevent a hand-to-hand fight, when the howling hordes surge over us! If only we could reach the hillock that somewhere here ought to interrupt the steep slope of the hill! Again two Changs pass me—their faces are alive with terror; the enemy must be close on their heels.

A salvo—bullets whistle over my head. I almost pull up, as I feel the air disturbed in the giant millet above me. Shots in front and the cries of the enemy behind. Who can be firing there in front? Surely the sepoy's can't be firing blind? No, they are running much too fast for that. The advance-guard have reached the small hillock on the slope, and are firing over our heads at the enemy behind and above us. Thank goodness! But don't shoot too deep!

Breathlessly we reach the hillock. The sepoy's have stopped firing for the moment, and the enemy seem to have withdrawn. The fire of our vanguard must have broken the wave of the attack only a few seconds before the launching of the first shower of spears. They must have been near! Now the fall of several of the leaders has stayed the rush, for the Nagas depend almost entirely on the leadership of a few champions, and, if these fall, the courage of the other warriors evaporates, as the courage of the Philistines at the death of Goliath. Blessed be the poor in spirit, for if the Pangsha warriors had run blindly on they would have certainly overpowered us.

Now there is not an enemy to be seen, and if I had a word to say regarding our policy, I would stay here on this very convenient hill, in this splendid strategical position, and wait for a second attack. However, Major Williams has good reason to think that the Pangsha warriors will change their tactics and attack us again in the jungle by the crossing of the river. Their numbers are so superior that to surround

us would be an easy matter. A quick withdrawal is the only way to avoid such a manoeuvre of the enemy.

Already we can see the groups of warriors collecting again on the slopes above us, and their battle-cry rises once more; but not with the same relentless urgency. It is no doubt tempered by the effect of our bullets, for in the face of our continuous firing they keep at a respectful distance, though always at our heels as we make for the valley.

Luckily there is only a narrow strip of jungle lining the river-bank, and by some special act of providence we hit upon the narrow path that brings us to the bridge. How thankful we are for the open, treeless slope on the other side, where no danger can approach unseen.

The Pangsha warriors follow us up to the river, and their shouts are anything but flattering. The Chingmei scouts catch some of the remarks and, as we go, they tell of the calls of our pursuers—rather monotonous, since they all harp on the same theme: 'First you come to fight with us and now you run away'. Well, yes, it was more or less true; but yesterday it was the Pangsha people who had run away, and they had only dared to attack when they found our numbers greatly diminished.

The danger is passed, but in face of the long march to Noklak, we find ourselves rather exhausted. There is still a long climb in the full blaze of the midday sun, and the basket on my shoulders, which in the excitement of the flight has been only infuriatingly clumsy, becomes suddenly very heavy. It may appear strange that none of the Nagas will carry my heads, but they argue that such a thing is taboo until they really understand how the heads are to be treated. If they will be considered as captured heads, then it means that each man who touches them may hold the head-hunting ceremony, but he is subject to the strongest taboos until he returns to his own village. If, however, they do not fall under the category of trophies, and their magical forces are already dissipated in the hands of Pangsha, then it is better that they should not touch them in any way. Until the question is seriously discussed and satisfactorily solved, no one will have anything to do with my heads.

To-day we are received with great friendliness in Noklak; the people have seen the flames of Pangsha mounting high into the sky, and they have no desire to share the same fate, or perhaps they are secretly relieved that their powerful neighbours have received a blow to their pride.

They wait for us at the gate of the village, with great mugs of rice-beer, and very grateful we are for this friendly action; yet, despite all this outward show, our hosts do not quite trust us, for again there is not a woman or a child to be seen in the whole village.

While Williams and Smith rest in the shadow, drinking rice-beer and trying to get cool, Mills and I forget our tiredness for the moment, for we feel we cannot forego an ethnological tour of the village. Noklak considers the shortest possible line of defence a strategic necessity, and the houses are built closely crowded together. There is hardly a banana bush in the whole village, for in the narrow spaces between the walls there is no room for such luxuries. The houses are all slate-roofed, but the morungs are thatched with palm-leaves, and stand at the entrances to the villages. The strongest fortifications lie towards Pango; between two fences built from the outer ribs of a thorny fan-palm there extend some three or four yards of dense impenetrable thicket, and the only way through is a covered passage with strong wooden walls, so narrow that only men in single file can pass through to the entrance of the village, which is barred with a strong door.

Now that the excitement is over and our curiosity to see the strange village is somewhat appeased, we notice how exhausted we are. The short way to the camp, which our coolies have already made quite comfortable, seems endless, and I can hardly put one foot in front of the other.

‘We must celebrate our lucky escape,’ says Mills as we sit down to lunch. ‘I think there are still a few tins of salmon. We will slaughter them.’ Tinned salmon has never tasted so good to me as it did that afternoon.

As the dusk begins to fall, we hear that men from Ponyo have arrived in Noklak, and we are surprised, for Pono lies on the Burman side of the Patkoi mountains, and

is a close friend and ally of Pangsha. They have apparently heard of the burning, and have come to pay their friends a visit of condolence. Why they have also come to Noklak is not quite clear to us, but perhaps they want to gossip in their village, and boast of the dangerous white men they have encountered. Mills invites them to come to our camp, but it is late in the evening before they appear with a few of the Noklak people; perhaps they did not dare to venture alone. However, we soon set them at ease, and when they have drunk a little rum they tell us that five Pangsha men were killed in to-day's fight and many more were wounded. Mills takes this opportunity of using the Ponyo men as ambassadors to Pangsha. He sends them messages, still offering them peace, but demanding the slave-girl. The envoys accompanying her will be assured of a safe-conduct, and are to meet us in Chingmei the day after to-morrow. But should Pangsha continue their policy of raiding and slave-hunting, then there were still bullets in our rifles.

MAKING THE PEACE

OUR spacious camp in Chingmei is untold 'luxury'. After the cramped quarters of the last days we thoroughly appreciate its comforts, sufficient sleep, and freshly cooked meals, for the contents of tins are apt to become monotonous, and in spite of the assurances of the different labels, seem always to have the same familiar taste. Now, to add to our wealth, Noklak has paid up a further fine of one mithan for the blocking of that path on the way to Pangsha; the coolies are already roasting the meat over the fires and preparing for a feast, while we indulge in that supreme delicacy, boiled mithan-tail. It is one of Mills' favourite dishes, and after twenty years in the Naga Hills he certainly knows what is good to eat. The succulent meat on the tail vertebrae of one of these huge animals is surprisingly tender, and much more tasty than any ox-tail.

The table in front of us is so littered with bottles, that some stranger would think he had walked in on a drinking orgy, so many are the half and three-quarter empties. Actually we are very economical with our whisky to-night, as every night, and even more sparing with the precious gin-and-bitters. This apparent debauch is entirely due to the custom, on tour in India, of bringing your own drinks, and so whenever we collect in the evening the boys produce 'sahib's bottles'. By now they are, unfortunately, rather empty; there have been too many cold evenings, when the thought of a warming drink has proved tempting.

The unusual stillness of the camp, where the coolies are also obviously enjoying a rest, is suddenly broken by excited voices, and a dobashi rushes into our hut:—

'Sah'b, Pangsha men are at the gate!'

We all jump up. No, these Pangsha warriors are not storming the camp. They are the negotiators whom Mills invited to come to Chingmei, and with them are the men

from Ponyo. Mills has always been convinced that, in spite of our rapid retreat, Pangsha would take the loss of five of her best warriors and the burning of the village as a shattering defeat, and would try to come to terms with us.

The door is opened and the dobashis let in the men, one by one, taking away their daos as a precaution. Nakhu and Matche are called to serve as interpreters.

Mills' reception of the negotiators in the 'mess' is a strange scene. I feel my pulses hammering; there is something solemn and tense in this meeting with men who only two days ago attacked us without the least intention of giving quarter.

Eight men squat in a semicircle in front of us. Only three are from Pangsha, the others come from Ponyo and Tsawlaw, two villages lying across the Patkoi; and it speaks for their courage that they have once more delivered themselves unnecessarily into the hands of their allies' enemy, or perhaps they have already discovered that we are not so fearsome as we were painted. However, they seem quite at ease, but the envoys of Pangsha stare gloomily before them and are still rather shy. One of them is Mongsen, the most famous warrior of Pangsha, and leader of one of the 'khels'; he sits in the middle. The Noklak people told us how he and Sangting led the raid against Saochu, rivalling each other in the taking of heads, and how Mongsen won, with the proud number of fourteen. But Sangting fell in yesterday's attack, and Mongsen now holds the undisputed place of 'first warrior'.

His speech is open and dignified. He attempts neither defence nor accusation. What has happened, has happened; we have burnt their village and killed some of their best men—they, too, have tried to kill us. But now they wish to make peace, and so they have come to Chingmei in answer to Mills' message.

Mills replies that peace is his wish too. He bears them no grudge, but Pangsha must swear not to take revenge on any of the villages who have befriended us. In future they must leave small villages in peace, and above all they must return the slave-girl. All the other terms are agreed to, but

in this last demand there lies a difficulty, for the Pangsha men assure us that the child has really been sold across the Patkoi through the mediation of Tsawlaw, but they know which village bought her. The transaction must have been carried through shortly before our coming, and in a great hurry, for Mongsen complains that the price is still owing. Well, so much the better; it should be easy to recover the child from a defaulter, and Mongsen promises to bring the slave-child as soon as possible.

The terms of the peace are concluded. Solemnly Mills asks Mongsen once more if he agrees that there should be no more blood between them, and, according to custom, drinks a mug of rum touching Mongsen's hand. He passes the mug to Mongsen, who, dipping a small piece of ginger into the rum and throwing it away, empties the mug of the last dregs. The ceremony is repeated with the two other negotiators.

Soon the Pangsha men lose their shyness, and they chatter freely about all the details of the fight. Mongsen tells us that he was in the front line during the attack, and though four bullets whistled a hair's breadth past him, he remained unharmed, because Mills, at their first meeting, when he had acted as Pangsha's envoy, had called him a 'lambu', a sacrosanct ambassador, one who will not be killed. The gods had heard the word, and he had escaped death. His companions smile during this tale in quite a friendly way; they seem to feel quite comfortable talking to their enemies of yesterday. They recount their losses during the fight, which they apparently consider an honest affair, and no cause for recriminations among straightforward men.

Involuntarily I think that we could learn something from men with such magnanimous minds. What a pity it would have been if a man of Mongsen's candidness had fallen victim to a bullet! Until this moment I have seen Pangsha in only the blackest light, but now even the remembrance of that three-year-old child's foot on the head-tree is dimmed, and I feel that you could surely make friends with these people just as well as with my Konyaks. They are Nagas, after all, and all Nagas have an amiable side to their characters!

Noticing that Mongsen has a burnt foot, Mills has the wound dressed. The foot was burnt, Pangsha's first warrior tells us, when he rushed into the blazing village as soon as we had left, in the attempt to save a pig he had trussed up and hidden in one of the houses. The wound is a bad one. How can he have led the attack and then limped all the long way to Chingmei with a wound that would have laid any of us up for weeks?

In the course of the conversation we learn that the Pangsha people themselves call their village Wailam. They know nothing of the expression 'Kalyo Kengyu', and apparently have no tribal name for themselves; they speak a language which, though related to that of Noklak, is different from the Ponyo language. I have the impression that the Ponyo men are not pure Kalyo Kengyus, but probably belong to the southern Konyaks, and in some way have become isolated from the main tribe.

When many mugs of rum have passed between us, we part from the men of Pangsha, Ponyo, and Tsawlaw as friends, and, looking at the cordial faces, you would think that the friendship was of much longer standing. The guests are to spend the night in Chingmei, partly in the camp and partly in Chingmak's house in the village; it will probably be late in the night before the groups round the pots of rice-beer (or rather, here in Chingmei, of millet-beer) will think of going to bed.

We too are stimulated by the conference, and in no little way triumphant; we celebrate the peace with an extra gin-and-bitters. Mills has every reason to be proud of his policy. A great area has been freed from the spectre of slave-raiding, and we can reasonably hope that gradually it will become more and more difficult for the devotees of human sacrifice in Burma to procure the victims they need until the custom eventually dies a perfectly natural death.

In the full light of day we have a better opportunity of observing the men of Ponyo and Tsawlaw. They wear their hair tied up in a knot in exactly the same way as the eastern Konyaks, and their faces, arms, chests, and backs are covered with most elaborate tattoos. We are astonished to notice

that not only on paper but also culturally, the main range of the Patkoi marks the boundary between Assam and Burma. For these men from villages lying on the other side of the mountains, but nevertheless only a short distance from Pangsha, wear the Burmese kerchief on their heads and carry daos of a pattern never found in Assam.

When Chingmak had first met the Ponyo men in Noklak, sheltered behind his white friends, and bolstered by the defeat of their allies, he had demanded the release of a Chingmei man, said to live as a slave in Ponyo, and now the young man is brought to Chingmei. Years ago, he had been sold as a small boy by Panso to Ponyo, but in some miraculous way escaping death he had been adopted by a kind-hearted couple and had grown up as a Ponyo man. He is tattooed and dressed like the other men from Ponyo; he does not show the slightest desire to be 'liberated'; he speaks only Ponyo, is married to a girl of Ponyo, and apparently lives there as a free and respected citizen, and does not altogether appreciate Chingmak's thoughtful liberation.

As farewell gifts Mills presents the envoys and the other guests with considerable quantities of salt, a highly-valued commodity in these hills. Immensely satisfied with the result of their mission and their experiences, which will provide enough food for gossip round the hearth fires for many a long day, they all leave the camp.

The main object of our expedition is achieved, but we are not yet to start on our way back to Mokokchung. We cannot miss the opportunity of visiting the famous Panso, a village that from hearsay we know to lie beyond Mount Yakko.

We are sorry to leave Chingmei and our camp there, for in these last weeks it has stood as a kind of home for us, and I realize that the chances of ever returning are small. All the last days in Chingmei it has been bitterly cold, and as we start early in the morning the ground is covered with hoarfrost. It is the first frost I have seen in these hills, and it dissolves quickly under the first rays of the morning sun.

Chingmak and his sons accompany us, but we must bid farewell to all the other friendly Chingmei people at the gate of the village.

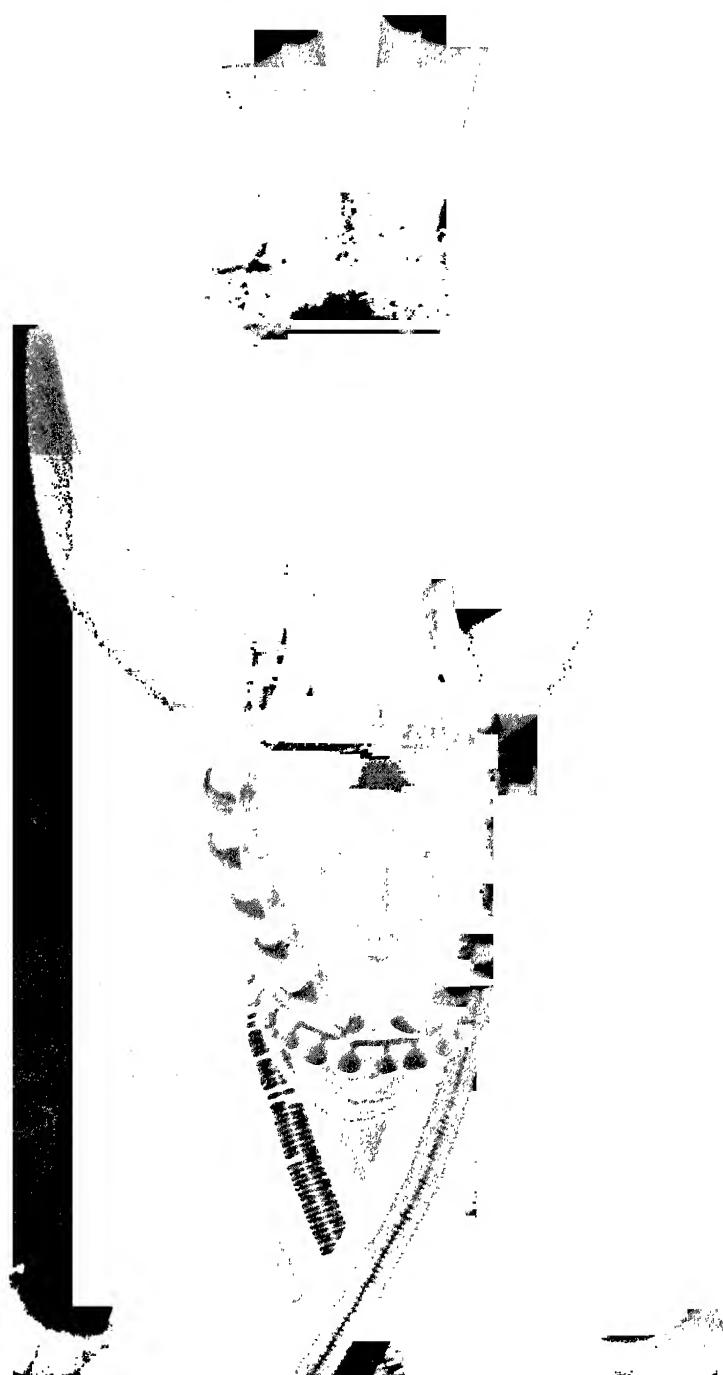
20

WITH PANGSHA'S ENEMIES

As the crow flies, it is only eight miles from Chingmei to Pango, but in between rises the broad bulk of Mount Yakkō, and it took us three days to skirt the base and make our way up the other side of the hill.

We are not afraid of any open resistance, yet the enthusiastic welcome of the inhabitants of Pango takes us completely by surprise. They have seen the smoke of the burning Pangsha in the distance, and are beside themselves with joy at the defeat of their enemies. There is even a certain maliciousness in their remarks on Pangsha's ruin when they meet us before the village; and we soon realize that it is not altogether without reason, for early this year a troop of Pangsha men, appearing before the gates of Pango, and challenging them to fight, had taken without any losses to themselves no less than twelve heads. The Pango men were inside the strong fortifications of their village; why, then, we asked, had they ventured outside? But Pango prided themselves; they were famous warriors, they said, and could not allow such a challenge to go unanswered. Well, Pangsha had taken twelve heads, but the white men have burnt her to the ground, and she has paid for those last insulting remarks her warriors had thrown over their shoulder as they left: 'We only wanted to show you what sort of men we are; you have nothing more to fear, only be careful! Don't follow us.' Sadly the men of Pango tell us they had not had the courage to follow and take revenge.

Now the white men have destroyed their enemies, and Pango joyfully acclaim the victors. They build us a good camp on a nearby hill, and come in a long train bringing pigs, rice-beer, and water, singing all the while, a strange work-song that resembles nothing so much as the desperate baaing of lost sheep; so strange a song that even our coolies find it funny, and spend a long time trying to imitate it.



25. A Panso Warrior with head-dress of mithan-horns and cheek strap of tiger's claws



When I begin taking a few photographs among the crowd collected outside the camp, my camera attracts the interest of the Pango men. It is hopeless to try to explain to them exactly what I am doing, but I seize on my green filter as something they might understand, and satisfy their curiosity by letting them look through. The tinted landscape creates great hilarity, and each warrior wants to try, until one man—turning my hand impatiently, the better to see—feels my wrist between his fingers; he finds its thinness much more interesting than the distorted view, and hastens to tell the other bystanders of the curious phenomenon, whereupon they all chatter excitedly and each wants to touch me, and feel my bones for himself. This interest is becoming altogether too personal; and I feel that at any moment these brown hands, clasping heavy daos, will itch to test the comparative frailty of my bones. Hastily I make for the camp.

Mills and Williams are horrified when they hear I mingled with the crowd outside the camp and that I aroused such interest among the warriors. More than once a white man has lost his head in this way; you should not lead Nagas into temptation, they say.

In Pango I had at last an opportunity of collecting some information on the social life of the Kalyo Kengyus. The main settlement is divided into two 'khels' or quarters, separated by a narrow corridor. Each of the two 'khels' is fortified against the other by a strong palisade forming two sides of a long corridor, and from sentry-boxes in high trees guards can watch the movements of their neighbours. It seems that civil war is not an uncommon occurrence, but, in contrast with more civilized nations, the men of Pango have wisely invented special weapons for these internal quarrels. They are in the habit of using, on such occasions, wooden swords instead of their iron daos, protecting the head with huge plaited helmets lined with pieces of old cloth. So armed, even the fiercest rivals do each other no serious harm, and superfluous energies find an innocuous outlet.

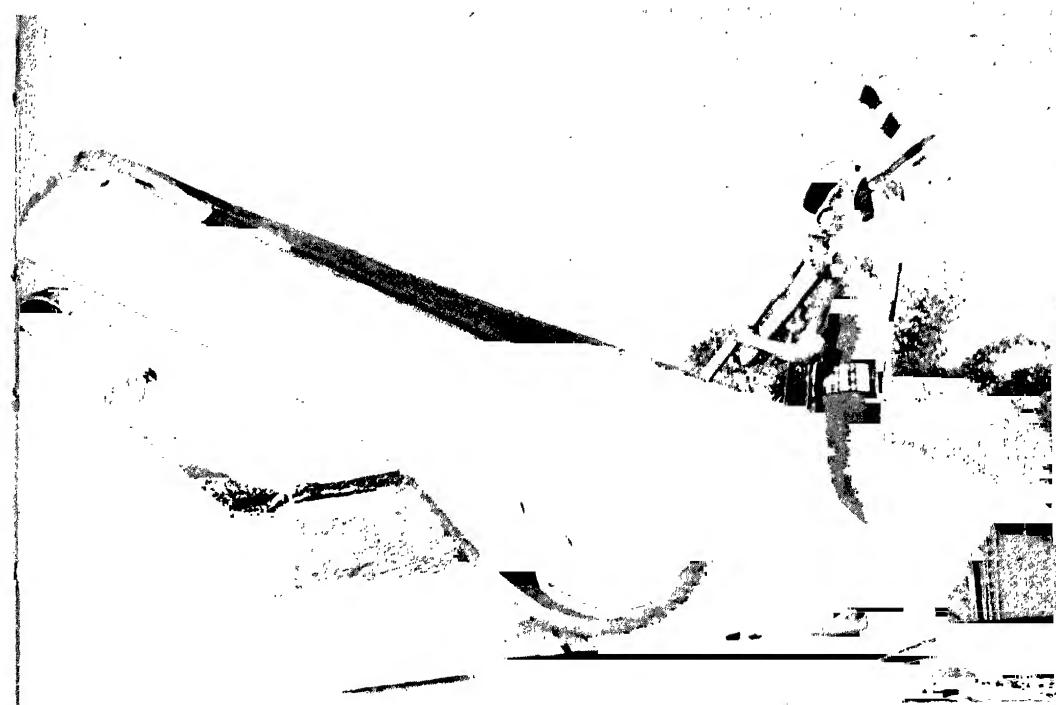
But these Pango men are not always as unsuccessful as in their recent encounter with Pangsha, nor so harmless as in

their internal quarrels; outside the house of the village dignitary, who functions at all rites connected with head-hunting, more than sixty heads are lined up against the wall. All the trophies of the village, when they have hung sufficiently long on bamboo poles in the open, are brought to his house and kept there; at his death they are ranged on his grave, and his successor begins a new collection. Apparently this particular dignitary has been in office a long time; sixty heads are a large number!

The great log drum, almost filling the morung, is very similar to those we have seen in Pangsha and Noklak. It is a mighty wooden tube, with two small holes instead of a slit in the upper side. Neither Mills nor I had ever seen such an immense drum, for it has a diameter of about four feet, and a man can sit quite comfortably in the mouth.

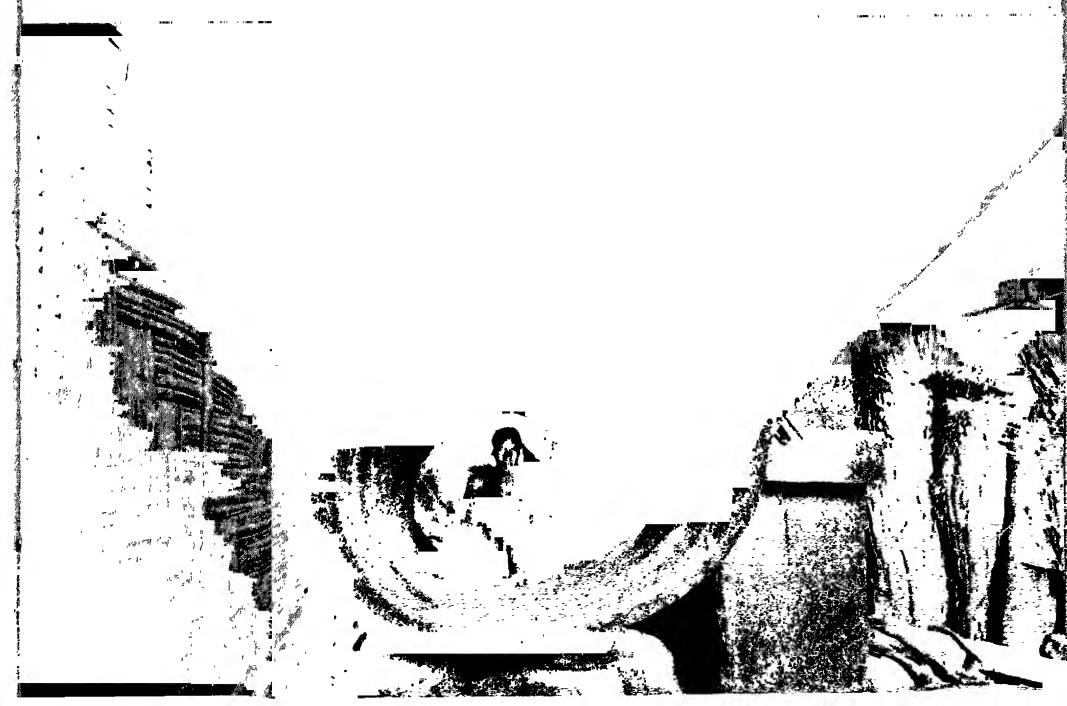
The great dance in honour of the victors is soon to begin, and a wonderfully colourful crowd gathers on the open space outside the village. The men stand in a long row, stretching from our camp down the slope, and start the dance with slow, measured movements. They wear full ceremonial dress—you might be tempted to describe it as full war-dress, but the Nagas never risk their costly feathers and ornaments in a raid, but treasure them for the glory of the dance. They have conical hats, of red and yellow plaited cane, tufted with flaming red goat's hair, and surmounted with two white hornbill feathers striped with black. Those heroes who have themselves captured heads are permitted to load their hats further with shining mithan horns and hold their hats in place with chin-straps set with tiger claws. Cowrie-shells are embroidered on most of the dark blue cloths and the small aprons reaching from the belt to the knee. The broad belt is set with white seeds, and supports a wooden sheath at the back, which takes the long dao when it is not in use. In fact, their ceremonial dress is very like that of the Changs, except that, in addition, they wear leggings of bearskin, which not only protect the legs against panjis but complete the harmony of the costume.

In one straight line they move together, slip-step right and slip-step left, and the song they sing, now and during the



26. A log-drum of the Kalyo-Kengyu Nagas

27. A Drum in Panso, large enough for a man to sit comfortably inside



whole dance, is always the same, and consists of a monotonous rhythmical baaing with a little bark on the high shrill note, only slightly different from the work-song that we had heard in the morning. Sometimes they jump into the air, with both feet together and closed knees, managing this with a precision that would honour a troupe of Tiller girls, and then once more they relapse into the tediousness of the slip-steps and the bending of the knees. There are none of those temperamental outbursts that characterize the dances of the Konyaks.

Now and again, without leaving the line, the dancers will stop, and several spectators, hurrying up with bamboo jugs full of rice-beer, will quench their thirst in a most original fashion. A tube stands in each vessel, and the dancers in turn suck up rice-beer, without even touching the vessel. Often the dance begins before all have received their full share, and the men bearing the rice-beer will go a little way with them so that the dance is not interrupted.

It is a lovely sunny afternoon, and this is a picture that even in these mountains you do not find every day. Again and again my Contax clicks, and men never before seen by Europeans are now fixed on my film. The dance is a splendid opportunity for photographing them naturally, and my telephoto lens allows me to pick out individual portraits from the crowd. I work, as so often, with both my Contax, using them in turn, with Nlamo holding one of the cameras, and in this way I save the necessity of changing my lenses. One is fitted with a rapid lens of normal focal length, for taking the group-pictures in quick motion, and the other with a telephoto lens, which is particularly useful among primitive people, who gaze, rigid and frightened, into the camera, as soon as you come too close. With such a lens you can take the tense expression during the song or dance at a distance of several yards without attracting any attention.

Long after we have returned to our camp the dance continues, finishing finally with a feast, in which Chingmak takes part; it is not until late in the evening that he comes home with a glowing nose and tottering steps.

In the morning we hear that he excelled himself the night

before, making great plans with his drinking-companions. Full of pride at his successful negotiations with Pangsha and Noklak, and stimulated with quantities of rice-beer, unusual even for a Naga chief, he had manifested himself as the great diplomat, establishing peace and concluding agreements with other villages, forging alliances and negotiating Panso's relations with their neighbours. But this morning he says he can remember nothing, and when Nakhu calls him to account for his altogether too-far-reaching political conceptions, he is most astonished at the stories of all these peace plans.

On the way back from Panso, we pass through the village of Sangpurr, once more coming across the forked posts set up at mithan sacrifices by the Changs, Aos, and Semas. Strange that, as far as we can ascertain, they are lacking among the Kalyo Kengyus, although they too hold feasts of merit. While our way leads through Yimsungr country, first two, and then the next day yet another, of our coolies pierce their legs on panjis, those devilish bamboo spikes that here are hidden everywhere in the grass. This time the wounds are serious, and the men have to be carried.

At Chentang we find more than one surprise, and, as after the climax of a drama, all our problems seem to solve themselves at once. The parents of the young slave from Saochu, whom we had long given up as dead, suddenly appear to fetch their daughter. They also bring the news of his wife's escape to the liberated youth, and even the father of the small boy from Kejok has come to fetch his son. Thus all's well that ends well, and the only shadow on our horizon is the uncertainty of the fate of the little girl sold over the mountains. However, Pangsha prove worthy of their new scarlet cloths, and soon Chingmak's men bring the child to Chentang, where Mills can hand her back to her overjoyed mother. The Chingmei warriors bring too the fine of four mithan and six eggs; incidentally, not fresh eggs, for they are the same ones that Pangsha had prepared for our first visit; however, such small things are of little consequence in a gift of good-will. Pangsha sends a message with the fine: they are very proud to be considered 'sons' of the Govern-



29. A young Konyak
Chief wearing serow
horns in his ear-lobes

28. J. P. Mills and
one of the rescued
slave-children





ment, but beg us not to return, for, as it is, they have a difficult enough time with their wives, who refuse to allow them to rebuild their houses as long as we remain in the neighbourhood. We send them all the necessary assurances, for we understand that even bold Pangsha men may have difficulties with their own wives.

The last stretch of the journey home leads through the land of the Changs, and we camp for two consecutive nights at their great mother-village Tuensang, from which all the other Chang villages are said to have sprung. It has already been visited by several other expeditions, and we find an ancient man sitting outside one of the houses and peacefully smoking his pipe, who can boast of having captured a sepoy's head many years ago. The sepoy had incautiously left the camp alone to fetch water, and this had been too great a temptation for that peaceful old man.

There are bundles of human hair waving from the hats of many of the Tuensang men. It is the hair of the women they have murdered—or seduced; failing the hair from a captured head, a man may wear the hair of his mistress, but never of his own wife, as an ornament to his head-dress: successes in war and in love seem to be displayed with equal pride.

After several long marches, crossing more than one 5000-feet ridge, we reach the borders of administered territory and build our last camp by the Dikhu river under the cover of high trees. It is the first time for several weeks that we have not suffered from cold during the night, and we sleep all the better on that account.

Our tour is almost at an end, and now we must think of dividing the spoils. We have been presented with more than fifty daos in the different villages and we distribute them among the dobashis, boys and the leaders of the coolies.

But the other part of our booty is much more important, and there is a strained tension about the camp until it is known exactly what will be done with the trophies. To their great disappointment, our coolies have not taken part in any fight when they could have used their spears and daos, and thus won the warriors' laurels; the sepoys on the other

hand have indisputably killed several Pangsha men, and resourceful jurists among the coolies hit upon the ingenious idea of substituting the heads I robbed from the Pangsha head-tree for those of the killed enemies left lying on the field. It is argued that since they were fairly fresh and had hung only on the head-tree, and not been stored in the morung, it is plausible to assume that they still retain their magical forces. Through this interpretation the value of my heads suddenly ascends to dizzy heights, and it is soon apparent that they will never reach any European museum.

By no means all the coolies take this point of view; the Lhotas and Rengmas recognize the heads as valuable trophies, and are burning with impatience to receive their share, but the Semas and the Sangtams stand on their dignity: a head that has not been separated from an enemy's body cannot be used, they say, for ceremonial purposes.

These discussions naturally make me think of my Wacking friends, and my promise to bring them back a trophy. I wonder which attitude they will take, but since they even substitute wooden models for the heads of fallen foes, I think they will accept the looted Pangsha heads as welcome trophies.

I hand over one of the heads to the Lhotas and Rengmas, telling them to divide it, so that each village should receive a small piece. It is not only the men who have been with us on the Pangsha tour who will thus gain the right to the dress of the head-hunter, but all those who touch the small piece of head with their daos. Excitement runs high among the coolies; they realize that their fellow-villagers will acclaim them as heroes, and the bringing in of the head will be followed by days of feasting.

As we cross the Dikhu next morning, a fine mist lies over the valley, giving the river, with the overhanging trees and boughs and the line of the coolies mirrored in the hardly-moving water, an ethereal look, almost like a Chinese picture.

Long rows of rice-beer pots stand ready in the Ao village of Longmisa to quench the thirst of our coolies; in addition, the village has set aside a pig, which Nakhu, as the oldest

and most esteemed Naga of our column, kills with the lower end of his spear. Such is the old Ao custom of greeting the home-coming warriors.

We welcome the small corner of civilization in Mokokchung offered by Smith's bungalow. His cook has prepared a marvellous meal, and after so long on short rations we eat gluttonously. Here, we hear of the abdication of King Edward VIII; the world and its troubles have caught us again.

Only Smith is to remain in Mokokchung. Mills and Williams must return to Kohima; while before me lies a long march into Konyak country. Once again the evening finds us united over gin-and-bitters. We congratulate each other on our safe return and a tour full of unforgettable experiences.

21

THE WHITE HEAD-HUNTER

THE news of my coming, and more particularly of the spoils I bring with me, has flown like wildfire through the hills, and it is not long before I realize that it is easier to carry a basket of bread untouched through a hungry crowd than a head-trophy through the Naga Hills.

Hardly have I entered the Konyak country, before I am waylaid by young men from Tamlu begging for a piece of head. Exultantly they carry the small piece I hand them over back to their village, singing of the glorious deeds of war, which incidentally they have never performed.

‘We are like tigers, terrible to our enemies; like hawks we pursue our enemies. Our enemies tremble and shake. We have captured a head from the village of the enemy . . .’

Here, one breaks off the song and asks me in a whisper:—

‘What was the name of the village, Sahib?’

‘Pangsha!’

And then, raising his voice, he sings:—

‘. . . we have captured a head from Pangsha; conquered are the men of Pangsha!’

It is no less grotesque when, shortly after, they ask me whether it is the head of a man or a woman, and close on my answer, follows the pompous announcement that they have captured the head of a man from Pangsha.

Tamlu holds a feast in the evening, but in spite of all the singing and dancing, I feel that here the head-hunting ceremonies, after forty years under British administration, are little more than the enactment of a drama. There are not enough men from the good old days, not enough warriors who possess the rank of head-hunter; and so the ritual of the ceremony seems to lack the right emotion.

I know there will be dancing and feasting to-morrow too, and since I should like to take some photographs, I ask the gaonburas if the boys could start the dance before mid-

day. Of course, they would be only too happy to dance for me—they would do nothing else the whole day. In the morning they tell me that as soon as the sun rises higher in the sky and the mist withdraws the dance will begin. Two hours pass, and the dancers are said to be prepared and fully dressed, and only hurriedly strengthening themselves with a little refreshment. Apparently they still indulge in this pleasurable occupation when the sun reaches the apex of his climb and begins his downward journey. Somewhat annoyed, I go to the house of a gaonbura, where I interrupt a drinking-party with my expostulations. Oh, yes, they say, the dancers are burning to show off their art, and would soon be called together. After yet another hour I meet the same gaonbura in the village; he asks me politely and innocently whether he should not hasten to call the dancers, and before which houses would the Sahib like to see the dance? Those who know the Konyaks will not be astonished that much time still elapses before the dance actually begins; and by this time the sun is rapidly sinking.

* * * * *

In my sleep I hear voices in front of my door and, dragging myself out of bed and stepping into the open, I find myself in the midst of my Wakching friends. Shankok is the first to greet me, and there is Dzeamang and many others whose faces I know, but whose names I cannot for the moment remember.

‘We have spent the whole night on the way, Sahib; we heard yesterday evening that you were coming, and we set out immediately with torches. We were not even afraid of the tigers in the Dikhu valley.’

‘But in any case I would have brought you the heads. . . .’

‘No, Sahib, that is not the same thing; we ourselves must bring in the heads, as if we were coming from a real raid.’

‘I see; but shall we not divide up the heads here?’

‘Yes, yes, Sahib. . . . I want a bit . . . and I—you promised me a piece . . . and me too——!’

‘Sahib, don’t give everything to the Wakching people; we are from Namsang and we also want a piece.’

‘We are from Wanching—Sahib, Sahib—a piece for Wanching.’

There is a turmoil of voices, shouting against each other, for boys have come from all the neighbouring villages.

‘Now peace! Don’t shout all together, and let’s sit down and divide up the heads.’

I take the heavy dao Chingmak gave me in Chingmei, and set to work. Never had I thought it could be so difficult to hack up a skull. How on earth do men break each other’s crowns with beer-glasses? But perhaps Naga skulls are particularly tough!

First I satisfy the boys from each of the villages of Namsang, Kongan, and Wanching, and each goes off with the small but precious piece of bone, beaming with joy. But now I must be more careful with the Wakching people; for I don’t want to hurt the feelings of any of my friends.

‘Listen a moment, I can’t give each of you a separate piece, but each morung will receive a piece, and then you can hold separate ceremonies.’

The solution is accepted.

‘Shankok, your morung has just been rebuilt, you are most in need of a head; which piece would you like?’

‘The part round the eyes, and there should also be a part of the jaw.’

This wish I can gratify, but when I propose to give the Balang people a piece from the back of the head, they cry at once:—

‘Not from the back of the head! not from the back of the head! We too want a piece of the jaw.’

Whereupon the people of the Ang-ban and Bala come with the same demands, and I have finally to break into the head I have set aside for the villages north of Wakching, before everyone is satisfied. For the Konyaks believe that the magical powers furthering fertility are not by any means distributed equally over the whole human head, but adhere especially to the parts round the eyes and lower jaw.

Immediately after breakfast we start; we are a long pro-

cession, for besides the Tamlu coolies carrying my luggage, there are all the boys from Wakching and Wanching.

No sooner do we leave the village behind than the boys scramble into the near-by palm trees, cutting the young, yellow, and still-unfurled leaves. They fringe them and fasten them to their carrying-baskets in long bundles that wave and flutter as they move, like great gigantic tails, sweeping the ground behind the very small boys.

It is a decoration that can be worn only after a successful head-hunt, Shankok explains, and the high, shrill shouts of the boys as they run down the path to the Dikhu river also belong unconditionally to the ritual of the bringing in of a head.

The hanging bridge has fallen into bad repair since last I was here, and my coolies cross over with some anxiety, and careful not to overburden the frayed cane, leave great distances between each other. But the newly fledged head-hunters find this is altogether too slow and too boring; and they throw themselves into the river and wade through the water, squatting on the other side while they strengthen themselves with a little rice before the long climb.

Dzeamang and I go together up the hill. He is more talkative than ever. He tells me that he has just married again; his morung has just been rebuilt; and now he is in possession of a head. Yes, now he can 'really jump to the sky'. His new wife comes from the neighbouring village of Chingtang, but it would seem that his marital pleasures are still of a somewhat speculative nature, for she still lives with her parents, and it is uncertain when she will move to Wakching. As the other boys laughingly tell me later, she probably uses the time very well, and thoroughly enjoys herself with her young friends in Chingtang.

Gradually the 'bold' head-hunters catch us up, and soon I find myself climbing through high jungle grass at the head of a long procession. Again and again shrill shouts ring out, seeming rather to increase than die down as we climb the innumerable stone, and sometimes wooden, steps up to the rest-house of Wanching. Many of the Konyak rest-houses are built over the paths like mediaeval porticos,

and here, where the path passes through, we find the younger brothers awaiting the Wanching boys, with feather hats and shields. The young heroes are soon dressed and run with small, dancing steps into the village, where the women and children are gathered together, awaiting tensely the arrival of the procession. The warriors stop under a large tree and form a circle, uttering hoarse cries that swell to a mighty song, full of vigour and strength in its long-drawn-out notes. An old and completely naked man begins a wild dance; neither advancing nor retreating, he jumps frantically from left to right, shouting shrilly and swinging his dao with movements that appear to challenge a crowd of enemies to fight for life or death.

Then the warriors all go dancing to the house of the chief, but my Wakching friends are anxious to leave. The people in their village wait eagerly for us, and we have still a good two hours to go.

Long before we reach the village we meet the gaonburas and the other old men; they give us an overwhelming greeting, and ply me with innumerable questions about the tour against Pangsha and the winning of the heads. I am glad to be in Wakching again, and to exchange the nomadic life of the last weeks for steady work among my Konyaks.

Excitement stirs in the procession as we climb the stone steps. There are large crowds on the resting-place before the village where the warriors have collected, they have put on their dance-hats and the old men wear the head-hunting ornaments of their youth; once more they can be proud of them, for has not the white Sahib kept his word and brought a head to Wakching?

So great is the throng crowding the place, and so loud the whirring of voices, that I almost miss a most important ceremony. The head-trophies have been laid down on a particular spot, and the eldest men of each clan solemnly smash a raw egg over the head. The egg is supposed, by sympathetic magic, to blind the relatives of the dead and render them innocuous. Then the clan elders sprinkle a little rice-beer on the heads, murmuring: 'May your

mother, may your father, may your elder and younger brothers, may they all come and drink our rice-beer, eat our rice; may they all come and eat our meat. May they all come!' Chinyang translates these hardly distinguishable words and adds his own, 'When we captured heads in my youth, we poured rice-beer into the mouth; to-day, we have only pieces of bone, so we must pour the rice-beer over them'.

These words are believed to compel the souls of the dead to call the relatives, and thus give the Wakching people the chance of capturing still more heads. Let us hope the magic will not succeed this time, for if the Pangsha men come here, I would be sorry for my Wakching friends; by which I do not want to cast any aspersions on their courage; only I feel they do not realize whom they conjure!

I no longer regret having given up my museum specimens, for the recording of an ancient head-hunting ceremony, so obviously doomed to extinction, is certainly of greater scientific value than a few skulls that can just as well be collected in fifty years. The magic formula at the feeding of the heads has already excited my surprise, for it is with exactly these words that the head-hunters on Formosa feed the heads of their victims with rice-beer, and thus this Konyak ceremony adds yet another element to the many parallels between the Nagas and the hill-tribes of that distant island.

However, this is hardly the time to dig up ethnological cultural affinities, for the men and boys of each morung are already forming processions and heading for the village with ceremonial songs. An old man with a piece of the head walks before, the men beating bronze gongs, and the long train of the young warriors and boys follow. I allow the five processions to pass me on the open space of the Balang morung. How different from the villagers of Tamlu! Here, not a man or a boy is missing, and the expression on their faces is deadly earnest. This is no show for the Wakching men, but a religious ceremony that will bring prosperity to the village and fertility to the fields.

The men of each morung dance for a while on the great place outside the chief's house, and then they go to their own men's house, where women wait with bamboos full of water and the young warriors start to wash away the 'blood' of their enemies. The older men bind the baskets with the heads to the great log drum, and soon the new warriors begin beating on the huge wooden trunk with such enthusiasm that the mighty rhythm, announcing the bringing in of a head, resounds over the whole country; each morung takes up the same rhythm, and it is late in the night before the thudding of the drums is silenced. When the boys eventually lay down the strikers and go to dance in their morungs, their places are taken by the young women and girls, and the drum resounds just as loudly, for they beat as ardously as the warriors. Their naked breasts tremble and sway with the movements, ever repeated, of striking the drum; milk streams from the full breasts of one young mother, but she does not pay much attention to it or to the infant she carries on her back, who seems to sleep soundly enough despite the deafening noise.

Night has fallen, and the elders of the Thepong hang the head in the central hall of the newly built men's house. There can be no better inauguration of a morung than this, for although the head of a hunted serow had taken the place of a human head at the rebuilding ceremony, the Thepong men are overjoyed at being able to make up the much-regretted deficiency, and the boys dance endlessly in front of the captured head. Over the fires rice-beer is boiling in huge pots, and even the women stroll about in the morungs, which to-day are open to them, so that they too may join in the singing and dancing. The spirit of the feast takes hold of the whole village, and no one thinks of going to sleep. Who would miss such an event? Years have gone by, and small boys have grown to manhood, without a head being brought to Wakching, and now the drum-houses resound with the full force of the head-hunting rhythm and the good old days seem to have returned.

Wherever I go I am acclaimed the hero of the day, and even the old women smile at me happily; for have I not

brought a head to the village? But happiest of all is my old friend Chinyang; memories of his youth stir in him, and he assures me with tears brimming in his eyes that to-day 'It is as in the time of his fathers'.

I would like to stay longer with my friends, for there is much to do at the feast, telling of my adventures, drinking rice-beer, and watching the dancing, but I am tired after the long march, and soon it is only dimly, and in my sleep, that I hear the distant beat of the drum.

After so many nights in different camps, it is good to be back in my comfortable bungalow. I revel in the thought that I will not be woken at the crack of dawn by military command, and that I will not have to shave and eat a scanty breakfast in a windy shelter before the rising of the sun. Here I breakfast at my leisure, waiting till the sun has graciously warmed the veranda of my bungalow. The Konyaks themselves rise late, and so breakfast is the only meal when I am seldom disturbed by visitors; and to it generally belongs the comfort of reading, for which otherwise I find little time. There is no morning paper in Wakching, and so I always fall back on my library—if the few books standing on my window-sill can be so called. Beyond a few anthropological works, the selection is not extensive; they are sufficient for my many months of solitary breakfasts. The Oxford Bible acts as a kind of book-rest to Goethe's *Faust*, Rupert Brooke's *Poems*, and *The Heart of England* by Edward Thomas. In my boxes lie a few detective novels, but they remain untouched, for before this view of plains and mountains, that reaches from the Himalayas to far-distant Burma—here, where good is still good and evil is still evil—who could be interested in the escapades of tricksters and gangsters? In Mokokchung the post had brought me George Moore's *Memoirs of my Dead Life*, and skimming over the pages, I feel already that it fits well into my contemplative atmosphere.

But the enjoyment of my first peaceful breakfast is disturbed. Yongem, my faithful water-carrier, appears with something apparently lying heavily on his heart. He comes with a woebegone face, for he is a member of the Oukheang

morung, and explains that unfortunately there has been some mistake in the distribution of the heads, and it is just his morung that has come to grief. When I divided up the heads yesterday morning in Tamlu among the boys of the other morungs, I did not notice that there was no representative of the Oukheang morung, and, packing the heads in a basket, had sent them ahead of me to Wakching. Thus it was that meeting Yongem on the path, I had no piece of the heads with me, and it had been impossible to hand over the Oukheang morung's share before we came into the village. The piece Yongem then received was not nearly so valuable as if he had received it on the path and brought it in triumphantly himself, because it does not lend sufficient support to the fiction that he himself is the hero. And there were further complications, for since he had received it in the village, it is difficult to decide whether he might wear the full dress of a head-hunter, and in particular if he might decorate his basket with a monkey's skull.

As consolation he wanted a second piece that he could use at the rebuilding of his morung next year, and since he thinks nothing of my objection that the head will be too old by then, I at last cut him off a small section more—anything to have a little peace.

Life begins to stir in the village. It is taboo to work on the fields to-day, and, after dancing through most of the night, the young people have slept well into the morning, and now they can be seen sitting on the platforms in front of their houses arranging their ornaments for to-day's feast.

In front of the Bala morung the young boys are helping each other with the putting on of their war-paint. Carefully they mark the two or three parallel lines on the breast and back with chalk. There are many different designs for the face. Here you see a boy with huge, spectacle-like paintings, there a boy with small spots on the cheeks and two lines running over the forehead. Even the huge shields of buffalo-hide are to-day covered with chalk designs.

The men shave each other's heads, first wetting the hair with a little cold water to soften it for the razor; they leave

a small tuft in the middle, and allow the straight hair to fall forward over the forehead. In front of another morung the young people are busy grinding indigo leaves and painting their white-bark belts with the green juice. It is only when it is cooked that indigo turns blue; the cold crushed leaves produce a green colouring. Strangely enough, there is no word for green in the Konyak language. Red and blue are the only colours used in weaving; and in painting the men's houses, only red, black, and white; you always mention whether a flower is red or blue or yellow, but the greenness of the rest of Nature is taken for granted, and there is no word to describe it; the Naga would never think it necessary to mention that he went through the 'green' forest.

The joyous spirit has also taken hold of the women, and although they will only be spectators of the day's dance, they do their best to make themselves beautiful. Most of the shyness of the girls has vanished, and they laugh at me, and make the gestures proper to cutting off a head.

Several of the boys have already completed their toilette, and now they begin to dance in groups of four or five through the village, showing off their beautiful attire. They run through the narrow streets in single file, spreading out on the open spaces to dance, if you really can call it so, these small jumps and rocking movements on the spot, with the rhythmical swinging of shields from the side over the chest and the simultaneous raising of daos.

The sun stands high in the sky, when the men of the Thepong form a procession and walk solemnly to the former house of the chief. This house has long fallen into decay, for the Ang Chinkak is a miserable descendant of a more powerful father, with absolutely no influence, and lives in another house; but this is where the ceremonies at the bringing in of the head used to be held, and the men of Wakching will always consider this the ceremonial place. Yesterday they had cleared it of all the overgrowing jungle, and to-day its prestige is once more established.

Shankok, the so-called captor of the head, walks in front of the procession of young warriors, carrying fully-leaved

bamboos. It is as though a whole grove is moving, as though 'Birnam wood comes towards Dunsinane'. Behind come the old men and the eldest man of Shankok's clan, carrying the head.

A small monolith stands on the ceremonial place; the young warriors quickly and securely bind their bamboos to this stone, and the head is laid in the centre, while Yonglong, a descendant of the village-founder, but otherwise an inconspicuous man, slips from out of the circle and begins to carry out the ritual of the ceremony. According to ancient custom, the tongue and ears should be cut from the head and buried under the stone; there are neither tongue nor ears on the heads I have brought to Wakching, but Yonglong generously covers over this deficiency, and continues the ritual with the requisites in hand. Once more the soul of the dead man is bidden to call the souls of all his relations so that they too may fall victims to the Wakching men. Now Yonglong is killing a small chicken and sprinkling the head and the stone with its blood; the intestines show whether the omens are favourable to the future of the Thepong morung.

The young people end the ceremony with a slow round dance, as the procession of another morung arrives, and Yonglong must once more repeat his part of the ceremony.

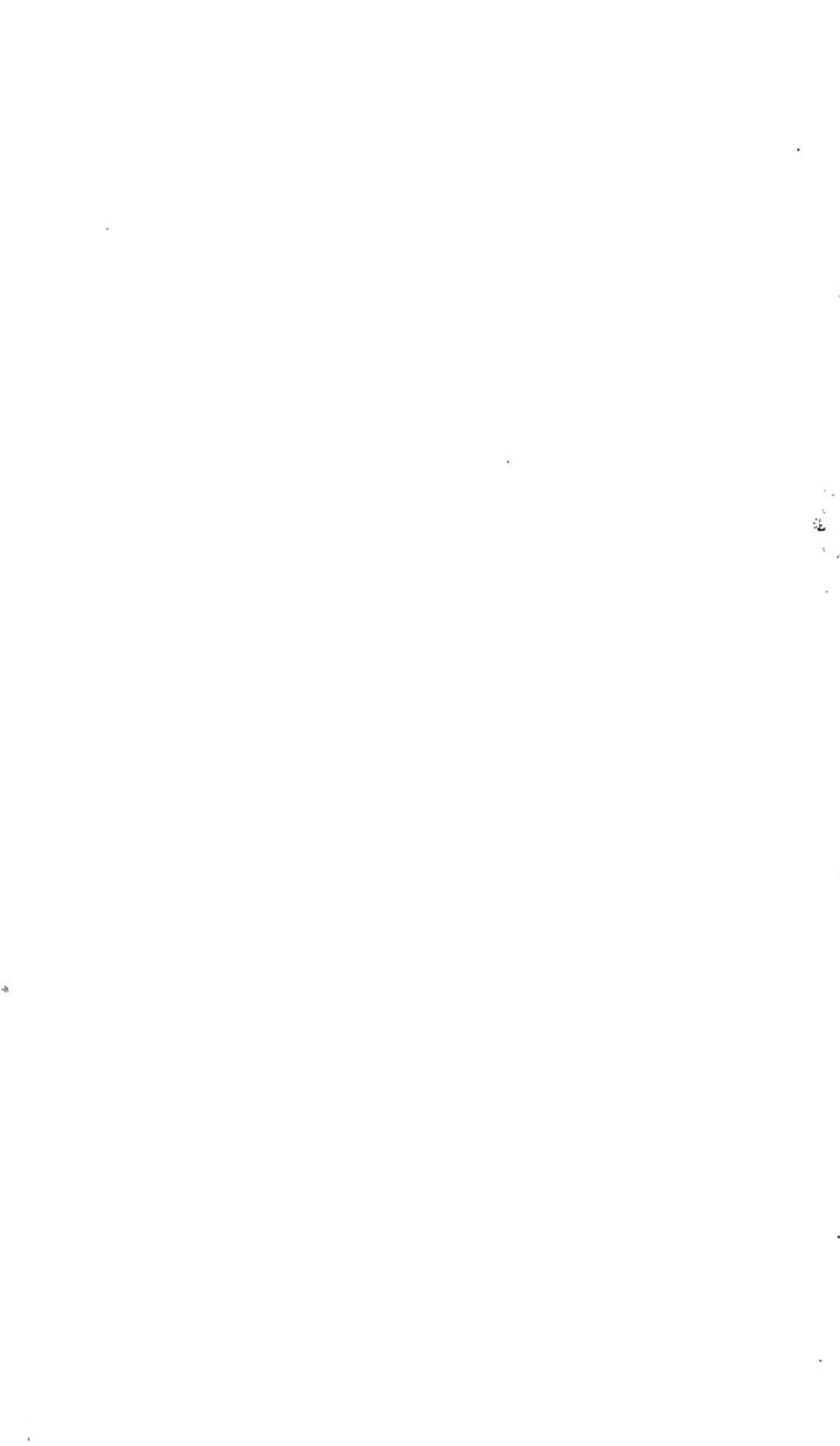
It is not until late in the afternoon that the great head-hunting dance begins, when every member of the morung, from the oldest men to the six-year-old boys, takes part. The men between forty and fifty, who have known the old days, and have captured heads in their youth, proudly put on their head-dresses with the curved horns, carved from the horns of buffaloes. Tassels of long human hair wave from the tips, and in between are fastened a mass of different ornaments. Here is plenty of scope for individuality; one man has fixed two huge hornbill beaks between his horns; another wears a white-painted monkey skull. Shankok stands out from all the other young men of the village. There is none who can compare with the richness of the ornaments he has inherited from the old Shouba. Since the death of his father they have lain useless in the great



30. Men of Wakching throwing their ceremonial spears

31. The great head-hunting dance at Wakching





storing-baskets, for until now Shankok had been without the right to the head-hunter's dress. But to-day he stands in all his long-cherished glory; six boars' tusks hang round his neck, shell discs cover his ears, and a fortune of yellow stone necklaces, the so-called 'spirit money', hangs on his chest. His hat is covered with boars' tusks and with the most beautiful of hornbill feathers.

Even the smallest boys, as yet too young to live in the morung, are all dressed up in hats and feathers, and most of them enthusiastically swing daos much too large for them.

Slowly the dancers pace round the stone-circle in front of their morung, but they are so many that the younger boys form two concentric circles within that of the older men. The song consists of two parts: the gruff voices of the older men sing a phrase in measured tones, and the shrill voices of the boys join in with hearty shouts. Though these alternate chants follow definite formulae the words are more or less improvised. Side by side with hymns of glory to Wakching and her warriors occur such phrases as 'Before we captured many heads, now we may not cut them off ourselves'.

The Thepong people leave their own morung, and move in turn to the Bala, Balang, Ang-ban, and Oukheang, dancing before admiring crowds of girls and women. Each of the other morungs forms its own procession, dancing independently through the village. It is a gay, colourful, and fantastic mixture of quivering, dazzling white feathers, swaying red goat's hair, and flashing daos.

In the old days, after a successful fight, things must have been much like this, and Chinyang's happiness at seeing once more the Wakching of his youth is echoed in me. It is a joy to see the eagerness and enthusiasm with which he instructs the youngsters and the care with which he prompts them with the words of the songs, or shows the right dance-steps to a small boy. It has long been a source of worry to the old men, that the younger generation was growing up without the right to the old ceremonial dress of their fathers. Now the danger is banished for some time,

for to-day even the six-year-old boys taking part in the head-hunting dance acquire the right to wear the head-hunting dress. There were tears in many eyes as the old men watched the roaring and dancing crowds, reviving the happy memories of their own youth, for the days of head-hunting seem for that day at any rate to have returned.

I am happy too, for helping the younger generation to acquire the dress of their fathers is but small return for all the helpfulness of my Wakching friends.

To-day's ceremonies by no means end the head-hunting feast. The trophies must be hung in carrying-baskets adorned with palm-leaves on the ficus tree outside each morung, 'there to dry and rot', and the final ceremonies will not be held until the fifteenth day of the coming lunar month, when the skull will be once more fed, and finally stored in the ancestral houses.

The weeks before this final feast are full of preparations. In threes and fours the young men visit the neighbouring villages; they must barter pigs for the forthcoming feast, and those who have not inherited their ceremonial dress from their fathers must make haste either to buy or to prepare the necessary ornaments. So much that belongs to the dress of a man of head-hunting rank is not produced in Wakching, and the villages in the east, who sell plaited dance-hats with goat's-hair plumes, ceremonial spears and dao handles, and a special kind of dance-basket, experience a period of great boom.

But money must be found for these transactions, and the Wakching people carry their 'pan' leaves and plaited-mats to the markets of the plains.

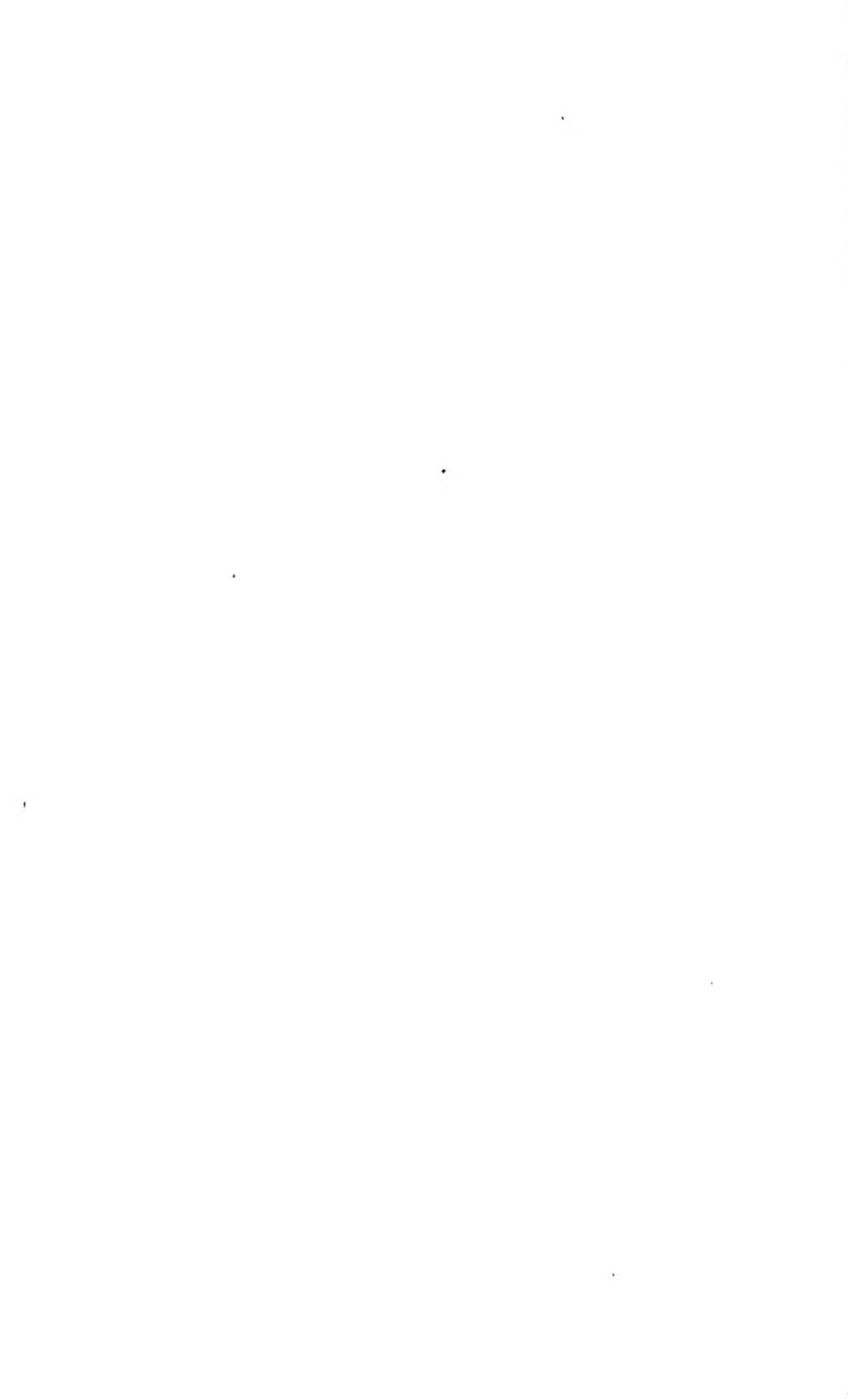
Thus the bringing in of a head not only furthers in a magical way the fertility of the village, but also in a more concrete manner acts as an incentive to trade and production. In fact, the prohibition of head-hunting deprives the Nagas, not only of an exciting sport, but also of a stimulation to increased economic effort. For in the life of primitive tribes every institution is linked so closely with the whole social structure that any enforced infringement has more



32. A Konyak Girl
with blackened teeth
laughing during a
dance

33. Intoxicated
Dancers of Wakhing





far-reaching consequences, than it is possible to foresee without intimate knowledge of the whole social and economic organism.

* * * * *

The feasts in Wakching are not the only head-hunting ceremonies I witness. Messengers from the other Konyak villages in administered territory have besieged my bungalow for days with petitions for pieces of the precious heads, but I do not want to hand over their shares at once, for I know that they will all hurry home to their villages and all hold their ceremonies at once and at the same time. A tour of the villages in the east appeals to me much more; then I can bring the trophies personally, and learn to know the differences between the various celebrations. This is not at all to the taste of the heroes, and they sulk on the veranda of my bungalow. In their own minds they see themselves already running home with the heads, when the whole village would welcome them as heroes, and now no amount of persuasion or explanations why they must have the head at once can change the Sahib's mind. At last it is only too clear that they must have patience and return with the message that the Sahib himself will soon bring the heads.

That I want to keep one of the trophies is incomprehensible to Shankok; he has always heard that the white men don't hunt heads.

'Why don't you give us this head too? It would be so useful to us here in Wakching, and you don't need it.'

'Look, Shankok, I want to take this head home myself; I have divided all the others up, but this one I want.'

'What will you do with the head at home? You don't celebrate any feasts with heads.'

'For ceremonies such as yours, of course I don't need it. But think, what would the girls of my village say if I returned after a whole year in a foreign land without a head? They would not believe I had ever marched against Pangsha, and they would not consider me a real man.'

This explanation Shankok understands. 'Well, if you need the head for that reason, then I won't take it away from you.' And laughingly he added, 'Perhaps you will

even find a wife—when you go home with the Pangsha head.' He never understood why I was not already married.

* * * * *

Once more I am in Longkhai. The light of the flickering fire plays on brown figures, crowded round the hearth, but does not illuminate the whole of the huge hall. Only the contours of the great wooden throne are recognizable in the gloom; but the throne is empty; the night is cool, and Mauwang sits with us near the fire, where a pot of red rice steams on three stones. Mauwang's half-brother lifts the pot off the fire, and with a long bamboo ladle heaps the rice on to the banana leaves, one set between every two men; and then distributes the thick taro mash. Conversation ceases. Squatting back on their heels, the men shove huge balls of rice dipped in taro into their mouths. Only Mauwang has a leaf to himself, for he belongs to the 'Great Ang Clan' and must not stain the purity of his rank by eating with other men—no, not even his half-brother. In a few minutes the huge heaps have disappeared and the men pour water over their hands and begin to prepare the 'pan' leaves with chalk and aromatic bark, ready for chewing.

Now is the time to speak, and with serious faces the men listen to my account of the march against Pangsha, the fight, and the capturing of the head trophies. None of them has ever seen that country, but wild rumours of slave-raids and human sacrifice sound threatening in their ears, and now, when they hear of the children abducted from their parents, they do not spare their expressions of indignation at the inhumanity of the evil men beyond the mountains. However far you wander, even if it be to the ends of the earth, a people will always consider themselves the personification of all virtue, and attribute to their neighbours all that they consider bad or despicable. The slave-raider horrifies the head-hunter just as much as the head-hunter horrifies his more peaceful neighbours.

Suddenly there comes to us the sound of music. What is that song out there in the night? Stepping into the open, I see the young men of the village approaching

with measured steps. The rising moon glitters on the broad blades of the daos, and the hornbill feathers on the hats shine white in her light. The boys are forming a circle on the place in front of the chief's house; already the song is rising, knees bend in rhythm, and the ceremonial dance begins. Suddenly I am no longer alone watching, for the chief and the men of his house stand near me, and in a moment a crowd of women and girls emerge out of the darkness. Why are they all looking so expectantly at me? Here comes a young man from the circle of dancers—he is coming towards me.

‘Friend, you must dance too,’ he urges me; ‘you have brought us the head. We are singing of the defeat of your enemies. We all wish you to dance with us! ’

It is quite a natural thought, for I am considered the real head-hunter, and if I refuse to dance I shall shake the people's confidence in me; the confidence I need so much. Already an old woman is plucking at my sleeve and showing me with gestures that I should join the dance.

In the hall of the chief's house I remember having seen a great dao, tufted with red and black goat's hair; I fetch it from the wall, for if I am to dance, I must swing the weapon due to my assumed rank as head-hunter, and, so armed, I slip into the ranks of the dancers; not a boy shows there is anything unusual about this new performer, and they continue the dance without a pause; only through the crowd of women passes an astonished murmur.

The dance is not difficult. A simple sequence of steps, endlessly repeated, but the dancers bend their knees on every beat and raise their heavy daos in their right hands. After a short time my knees and arms ache, but the strong rhythm of the song irresistibly compels me to continue.

The girls have prepared small parcels of ‘pan’ leaves to chew, and they press them into the hands of their friends as they dance. I too find a parcel being pressed into my hand, and looking round I find that the principal wife of Mauwang has shown me a great sign of favour by offering me betel. Whether for good or evil, I must put it into my mouth. It has a sharp, aromatic taste, not altogether

unpleasant, reminding me faintly of pine needles, but the astonishing thing is how strongly it stimulates the flow of saliva. In a few minutes I must follow the example of the other dancers, spitting again and again.

Is it the chewing of betel which holds in abeyance the tiredness and aching of arms and knees, or is it the suggested strength and endurance of the rhythm? Although the words are strange, I do my best to join in the melody of the song that swings the dance and conjures up visions of fights and heroes. Voices carry far into the night, and the rhythm that they bear resounds in the darkness, gripping the singers and blending them one and all, till they finally merge in the unity of the dance. This rhythm is more than art, it is the voice of man's primeval instinct, the revelation of the all-embracing rhythm of growth and decay, of love, battle, and death. The pallid skulls watching the dance from the front of the morung are also symbols of this harmonious alternation of death and life, life and death; brought home in triumph from countless raids, they in their death are magically linked with the happiness and prosperity of the village.

Is it only man who seems suddenly possessed by this all-overpowering rhythm? Are not these white clouds, sweeping over the moon's face before a mighty wind, is not this play of light and shade in the heavens, a part of this same rhythm? Song and dance have become one, and they are one, too, with the rustle of the dark tops of the palms, the wild flaming fire, and the distant outlines of the mountain peaks.

The ranks of the dancers break at last; brandishing their daos and uttering shrill war-cries, they rush round the place, ending with a long-drawn howl. I am exhausted, and suddenly so dizzy that I have to lean against a house-post. Now that the tension is past, I look at my watch. We have danced more than two hours without stopping. Is it the exhaustion that makes me giddy or the unaccustomed betel? But whatever it may be, I am glad that my bed is not so very far away.

* * * * *

From Longkhai I go to Hungphoi, Wangla, and Oting, and wherever I arrive with the pieces of the Pangsha heads, there is occasion for day-long ceremonies.

During the feasts it is not always easy to distinguish between the traditional songs from ancestral times and the many improvisations. My notebooks are full of fragments, many almost impossible to understand. Often even the Konyaks themselves do not know the exact meaning of the individual words, for the ancient language of songs is very different from the language in everyday use. Yet it is no dead idiom preserved only in traditional formulas, for to-day the young men and women still compose new songs in the same stereotyped phrases, though they are unable to give a word-for-word translation. In Hungphoi I manage laboriously to write down one complete song, thinking that I have captured on paper another part of the old head-hunting ritual. However, with the help of Chingai's word-for-word translation into Assamese, I learn that it is only a song about myself and runs:—

‘The Sahib came as the wind, as the storm is he over our land; he brings heads to us all, all men give him thanks. Here stay the heads; from Pangsha are the slaughtered enemies.’

LOVE AMONG THE KONYAKS

ALL who come in contact with primitive peoples wonder whether their feelings and thoughts are fundamentally different from ours, and many despair of ever finding an answer to this question. For, judging the natives only on their behaviour towards the European, it is hard to gain a correct impression of their mentality.

During the first months of life among the natives it is difficult to recognize their natural reactions to events within their own sphere of life, for the contact with the white man, in itself, means such a novel and exciting experience, that they rarely speak freely of their own feelings. This was true of the Konyaks of Wakching. Many months passed before one or two men gave me not only information on their customs and other things in general, but began to speak of those personal things that lay nearest to their hearts. Since I brought home the Pangsha heads, however, the ice is broken, and I feel that I am really getting to know some of the men intimately.

Of all the men of Wakching, I am fondest of Shankok, the son of the dead Shouba. Often I go with him to the fields or to hunt for green pigeons in the palm-groves, and many an evening he will sit for hours on my veranda talking of the events of the day and our own personal experiences and reactions. I could not hope to find a more ideal companion! Shankok is never sulky or morose, he is always eager to tell me of anything I want to know, or to show me how things are done and why, and I am quite at home in his house, walking in and out at any hour of the day, almost as though it were my own.

Last year, Shouba, Shankok's father, died. He was the richest man in the village, and left a huge fortune, which Shankok, as his eldest son, inherited. His two hundred and fifty fields lie strewn over the Wakching land, and this

year, he tells me, his wealth of rice and millet fills four granaries. Shankok is esteemed for his wealth, for there is always a place at his hearth for the hungry, and during the great feasts his house is full from morning to night.

However, even among the Konyaks wealth carries its burden, and in these first days of spring, Shankok, despite all his riches, is not happy. His heart aches for his love Shikna, and his spirit revolts against a fate, which I must admit is in no way enviable.

When Shankok was still a boy, his father had married him to Shonga, the daughter of a rich man of the Bala morung. The girl was already full-grown at the time, and her father had hesitated to give her in marriage to so young a boy; but the old Shouba had overridden his objections, promising that if the marriage broke up, Shonga should receive heavy compensation.

The boy Shankok was not greatly interested in this marriage, for according to Konyak custom Shonga stayed in the house of her parents as long as she had no child. She was a pretty girl, and did not lack for lovers; no doubt it mattered little to her that so many years must elapse before the consummation of her marriage. But in time she bore a son, and should have moved to her husband's house, but the little one died, and she remained with her parents, continuing her love-affair with one of the boys of the Thepong morung. About eight years ago she bore yet another child, this time a girl, and then went to live in Shouba's house, under the same roof as Shankok.

By this time Shankok had grown to manhood, and, theoretically, little stood in the way of his married life, except that he just was not interested in his wife; he could not help it if she lived in the same house, for there his father was master, but to lie with her was different; no one could force him to do that. He simply ignored her, looking straight through her as though she had no more substance than the air around her, and never addressed her with so much as a word.

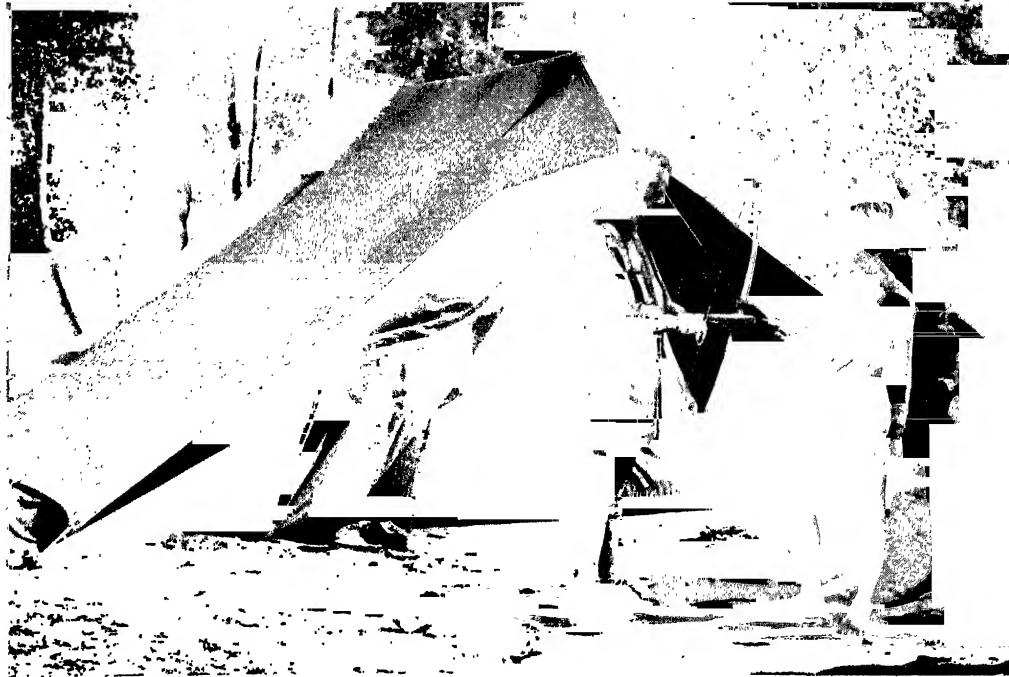
The passing of the years saw no slackening in Shankok's resolve. He did not love Shonga, he could not bring him-

self to be her husband, and therefore he continued to lead the gay and charming life of a bachelor in Wakching. This suited him exactly, for Shankok himself is gay and charming, and why should he spoil the best years of his radiant youth? He does not foreswear love because he has a wife ten years older than himself; there are plenty of pretty girls in Wakching, only too happy to yield to his persuasions, and the years that have passed since his growing up have been full of light-hearted frivolity and light-hearted affection.

When the old Shouba died last year, the position changed but little. Shankok is now head of the house, and he could divorce Shonga if he wished, but his mother still creates difficulties; she is a dignified and highly energetic lady, and opposes such a drastic measure; and Shankok himself shuns the scandal and the payment of the colossal fine.

Even now he takes no notice of Shonga. He does not sleep in his own house, but as night falls he meets his love, and together they go to the granaries on the outskirts of the village. His love is called Shikna, and ever since I came to Wakching their love has blossomed like the rice in the fields, and the nights have been full of joy and happiness. Not that their love is an open book where all who will may read, for during the day they are never seen together, and if by chance they meet, hardly a word passes between them; but every evening Shankok goes to the house of the Balang girls, where Shikna sings and makes merry with her friends, and together they will slip away, disappearing among the shadows of a granary. In former years, Shankok would take his loves to his own granaries, but now he has given that up, and goes where he is less likely to be recognized, for it once happened that his wife, Shonga, followed him, and tore him from his sweet dreams with a flood of insults; on this occasion he had not been lazy in retaliating and had continued the night with his love, but he is careful that no such unwelcome disturbance should recur.

Alas! the weeks of love for Shankok and Shikna are



34. A Konyak Boy showing me his cross-bow

35. Shankok cutting his brother's hair against the sharp edge of a 'dao'





numbered, for Shikna is expecting a child, and as soon as it is born she will have to move into the house of her betrothed husband, and she will be lost to Shankok.

‘It is always so,’ complains Shankok sadly. ‘Whenever I love a girl she immediately becomes pregnant. There are already two of my children growing up in the houses of other men, but the child in my house, the small daughter of my wife, is not mine. Yet I must look after her and be looked upon as her father.’

Every man in the village knows who the real father is, but it is Shankok who is considered her lawful father; she belongs to his clan and he must look after her.

But much more tormenting than the thought of his children growing up as those of other men—after all, quite a common and accepted custom among the Konyaks—is the loss of his beloved Shikna. He assures me that his love flows more deeply than the stream in the valley; he will never love another girl as he loves Shikna. Last year he gave up an affair with Henlong, whom I think the most beautiful girl in the whole village; true, he tried to carry on both affairs at once, but before long Henlong noticed his unfaithfulness, and bade him choose between her and Shikna. He had chosen Shikna; and with her he had been happy—happier than he could have imagined; but now she was going to have a child and be lost to him.

There was only one way out of the situation. He would have to divorce his wife, richly compensating her family for the insult; he would have to pay Shikna’s husband a large enough fine to compensate him for the bride-price he paid for Shikna and for the expenses he incurred at the wedding. In addition, he would have to pull down his house and build it anew, for it would be considered wrong to bring a second wife to the house where the first had lived. And then, when he had done all these things, he would be able to marry Shikna.

It is not even as easy as that, and Shankok cannot decide on any course of action. His mother tells him she will not live under the same roof as a new wife—his relations will certainly reproach him for squandering the family

fortune on his love. To me a separation of his purely nominal marriage seems the only possible course, and I try again and again to win him over to the idea of divorce. I remind him that there are many other Wakching men separated from their wives, and even his own father Shouba only married his mother after divorcing his first wife.

Shankok is bound by the fetters of his own riches; the relatives of his wife demand an unheard-of fine, and the men of the village council, whose task it is to pass judgement in all such cases, would try to line their pockets at his expense.

‘I myself don’t know what to do—sometimes I think so, and then I think so. It bears me into both directions! ’

‘In your place I would not be afraid of the cries of the others. Look at Metlou—he has already divorced two wives; and think of your fathers—they went to fight, and they were not afraid. Come, Shankok, you should not be frightened either.’

‘Yes, to go to war—to fight, even to die, that does not frighten me. But all these pleadings! To-day pleadings, to-morrow pleadings, day after day shouting and quarrelling in my own house—that I am afraid of.’

Shankok’s is not a fighting nature, at heart he is too sensitive; and the Wakching people feel this too, for when I talk to the old men of the possibility of Shankok’s divorce, they remark, and perhaps not unjustly: ‘Shankok is no “he-man” or he would have divorced his wife long ago, and paid the fine to her relations’.

Neither is it avarice that makes Shankok shun the cost of the proceedings—no one can be more generous—but he thinks of his four younger brothers, all dependant on him, and hesitates to encroach on their inheritance. He is the first-born, and the sole heir to old Shouba’s land, but when his brothers marry and build their own houses he must give them enough land every year to cultivate.

In spite of all these troubles, Shankok retains his good humour, and I am often astounded how quickly a mood of deep depression can change and how he will once more laugh heartily over some joke.

His love for Shikna and his sorrow at losing her do not in any way dim Shankok's appreciation of the charms of other pretty girls, and when we go together to Chingtang for the celebrations of the Ou-ling-bu, when the leafless branches of the high trees are covered with white blossoms, I notice that it is not long before he finds one among the row of dancing-girls who pleases him. I find her very pretty too, with a narrow, unusual face, and Shankok praises her smallness, which is considered beautiful among the Konyaks.

He shows me the room in the chief's house where the girls sleep, each in her own tiny compartment, each on her own small bench, which looks narrow even for one, but which, Shankok assures me, is wide enough for two. Completely enclosed, these small compartments give on to a corridor, but the entrance is so narrow that the girls can easily forbid unwanted visitors. Yet it does sometimes happen that under the cloak of night strange boys slip in and dally a while with by no-means-reluctant partners. If no word passes, and the dark throws no betraying shadow, they leave unrecognized, and consequently the girls of Chingtang occasionally find themselves with child, unaware of the father's identity. In such a case, Shankok tells me, a clever girl will entice a rich youth into her chamber, but instead of letting him go in secrecy, will hold him tightly, screaming at the top of her voice, so that all the members of the Ang family come to see what the matter can be. The sly maid then accuses the unfortunate lover, caught like Ares in the net of Hephaestos, as the father of her unborn child; circumstances speak all too plainly, and there is nothing left for him to do but marry the girl or pay a fat fine.

The next morning, Shankok tells me with great pride how he has really conquered the little one with the merry eyes, and how he has exercised his right as member of a great and strong village to throw out a Chingtang boy, also courting the favours of his love. The Chingtang people, who in former times enjoyed the protection of Wakching, even to-day recognize the overlordship of the Thepong morung, and pay them considerable tribute. To enjoy

the favours of the girls of Chingtang is one of the privileges accorded to Thepong men, and though the girls are not compelled to comply, they are seldom hard-hearted enough to allow the boys, who have come all the long way from Wakching, to go home uncomforted.

Shankok does not consider his adventure in Chingtang in any way unfaithfulness to Shikna; to sleep with a pretty girl of a neighbouring village at the Spring Festival is the most natural thing in the world, and has little to do with his love for Shikna.

Several weeks later Shankok appears in the evening, his face full of despair. I understand at once what has happened: Shikna has borne her child, and is already in the house of her legitimate husband. They met under the moon, the night before last, but yesterday when he had gone to the Balang morung, he had heard the other girls talking among themselves of the birth of Shikna's child; sad and ashamed, he turned away, without even asking if it were a boy or a girl.

'Then I went to the morung, but no sleep came the whole night. It hurts, if we have to separate so suddenly. We were so long together. Like brothers, we helped each other. Like father and child we were together. This morning I went with my morung friends to the fields. They did not yet know of the coming of Shikna's child, but they all asked me what was the matter. "What is the matter with Shankok?" they said. "He doesn't talk, no word comes out of his mouth; are you ill, Shankok?" So they all ask me, but I was ashamed to tell them. The whole day I can think of nothing else. Alone, how shall I go to sleep in the morung?'

When I ask him if he and Shikna might ever meet again, he replies apathetically that even if they meet by day, they will be too shy to speak to each other, and now they can no longer go together at night. Of course, he says, it is possible to meet even a 'woman in her husband's house'; in some far-away granary, but such fleeting moments are not the real thing, and there is always the danger of being pounced on by the husband or his friends.

I try to cheer Shankok, and a few days later I suggest that he should seek among the girls in Wakching for another love; but he shows very little interest. 'A new girl cannot be as Shikna; with no other girl could I get on so well. What I said entered her head, and her words easily entered my head; what shall I talk of with a new girl? It can never be as nice as with Shikna.'

Some time ago I happened to take a photograph of Shikna, and I give a copy to Shankok; he fixes it to a kind of wooden back, so that he can always carry it with him and keep it in his bag.

Gradually, however, the solitary life begins to pall, and in spite of his first scruples, Shankok sets about looking for a new girl. But it is not so easy, for all his old acquaintances have married long ago, and the younger girls, who have not grown up with him, or who have only known him as their elder sisters' friend, are afraid to trust a married man. So he spends long, boring nights alone in the morung, and he laughingly remarks that this is turning his face quite 'brown and ugly'. Only when you sleep with your love, Shankok says, does it remain beautiful and reddish.

Any kind of prostitution is unknown among the Konyaks; and one day Shankok tells me of something dreadful he has heard from some Kongan people: that Assamese women demand money for their favours. He simply shakes with laughter at the thought of paying four or eight annas for an hour of love.

Generally the Wakching people do not suffer from heart-ache, for most of the young people may choose their own partners, and Shankok has only his wealth to thank for his difficult situation. Thanks to the far-reaching freedom the girls enjoy before they marry, the unions are generally happy, but nothing would be further from the truth than to think that the Naga finds one girl as good as another, or that considerations of physical pleasure are uppermost in his mind; he often prefers intelligence and cheerfulness to mere prettiness, and the first passion of love is often followed by real affection between husband and wife. Even though childlessness is the greatest of misfortunes, and often leads

to divorce, I know many men who forgo all hope of children rather than separate from their wives.

Early marriages have only the character of engagements, and the girl, if she finds a boy she likes better and who is prepared to marry her, may dissolve the first marriage without difficulty. But obstacles do arise, and then there is always the extreme way out: the young couple can elope to a friendly village. Love affairs seldom end tragically, but that does not mean that the Konyak does not know the meaning of the '*grande passion*', and I have even heard of a girl hanging herself when she could not marry the man she loved.

The system of early betrothal has an advantage, for it means that few children are born out of wedlock; at the moment there is not a single child in the whole of Wakching who has not a legal father.

Since it is easy for the Konyak girl to follow the dictates of her own heart, it is not astonishing that the position of the married woman is high. She is the lady of the house, and she is treated on equal terms by her husband. If he is away from home, she receives his visiting friends from other villages with the greatest of ease, and may even ask them to stay in the house till her husband returns.

Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the wild Naga Hills their free and happy life; and those who measure the culture of a people by the social position and personal freedom of the women will think twice before describing the Nagas as 'savages'.

23

THE SPRING FESTIVAL

THE platform of the chief's house is filled with a merrily chattering crowd of women and girls, and in the middle the whole family treasure of the house of Longhai lies spread out on two large mats. Early that morning the girls of Ang clan had pulled down the great storing-baskets hanging in the roof and cleaned all the glass beads, shells, and brass bells with water and sand. Now they lie, sparkling, gay, and tempting, in the sun, and the girls are longing to try them on, for it is only once a year, at the great Spring Festival, that they may be worn.

Mauwang's wife is already dressed, many precious necklaces hang round her neck, and now she is dressing her four-year-old daughter. She would like to hang all the valuable ornaments and trinkets on this much-loved child, but already the little one can hardly move, and blinks wonderingly at all the shimmering things she is so unaccustomed to see on her chest. Now the mother begins to shave her head, but the child protests with hands and feet; she does not find the procedure at all pleasant and lets out furious shrieks, which even Uncle Wankau cannot calm as he hurries up and takes her on his knees. Suddenly the small girl stops; one look at the stranger approaching to take her photograph has done more than all the kindness of her relations, and her mother begs me to go on playing the bogey until the operation is finished. The child is shorn bald, except for a small tuft on top of the head, and her mother adorns her with a fan-like feather-crown.

Now the Ang's wife turns her attention to the toilette of the young girls, for she is an artist at dressing hair, and all the Ang girls beg for her help. They sit back happily on their heels, one behind the other, each busily engaged in dressing the tresses of the girl in front. First the hair must be thoroughly cleansed and combed and brushed down over

the back and shoulder. Then it must be rolled tightly into a tail, and bound round with a long ribbon of bark. If any girl's hair is on the short side, then the end is tucked into a bamboo tube and the bark ribbon so bound that not even the most curious eyes can detect where the hair fails.

Among the girls is Ngapnun; I recognize her at once, for the last time I was in Longkhai I was struck by her graceful movements and perfect figure. Perhaps, for the first time among the Nagas, I almost regret the necessary reserve of the anthropologist, for to watch Ngapnun merely as a cool observer seems almost an insult to her beauty. She has all the graciousness and self-assurance that you find in a great lady, or sometimes in the naïve women of the Southern countries. But with her the gracefulness is in no way naïve, but is rather an expression of her strong personality and a consciousness of her rank. I have never in my life suffered such a defeat as followed my attempts to make Ngapnun smile, I might just as well have been coquetting with the statue of a Greek goddess; the effect would have been more or less the same. Even when I give her some skeins of red wool, so valued by all other Naga women, the proud beauty does not even deign to look at me, but takes the gift as some tribute she has a right to expect. Much as this behaviour hurts my self-respect, it has one great advantage: un hindered, I can photograph Ngapnun wherever she goes and at whatever she is doing, without her paying the least attention.

At last the long brown hair is ready, the parting made, and the hair plastered down with water, and now Ngapnun can begin dressing. She throws aside the coarse cloth of the ordinary working days and replaces it with a gaily embroidered skirt scarcely the width of her hand, more of an ornament than a garment. While her skirt is of scarlet, the other girls of the common people may, even to-day, only wear skirts of dark colours. Round her slim waist Ngapnun fastens a girdle of many rows of coloured beads. Innumerable necklaces, many of golden-yellow stones, others of shells and discs of bronze, make any other bodice superfluous, for the wealth of ornament almost conceals her small, firm breasts, and her long, delicate arms, that have almost a



36. *The Girls' Dance at the Spring Festival*



37. *Girls of Longkhai dressing each other's hair*

childish look, are covered from wrist to shoulder with rings and bracelets. Now she puts on her little anklets of bells that tinkle at every step. They are quite new acquisitions that have found their way from a bazaar in the plains, and Ngapnun's heart glows with pride at the sight of them, but however much they please her heart, they are not nearly so valuable as her bronze armlets, heirlooms whose provenance is shrouded in mystery. The broad band, made that morning from a fresh leaf, binds her forehead like a diadem, and heavy ear-rings hanging to the shoulders put the final touch to her ceremonial dress.

No part of her is now unadorned except her narrow hands with their long, slim fingers, whose only ornaments are the fine blue lines tattooed at the cost of so much pain. Does Ngapnun suspect that despite the traces of hard field-work these hands of hers are beautiful? You have only to see her regal carriage, her confident smile, and the slightly mocking twinkle in her brown eyes, to know that she is fully conscious of her charms.

No Diva could take longer over her toilette than these girls, and it is already past midday when they begin their dance on the bamboo platform. For hours they pace hand in hand, tripping round and round in time to a monotonous chorus of song. There is little variation in the steps of the dance and in the eternally repeated songs; but the old women, crowding round the platform and proudly watching their daughters, find nothing boring in the performance, and seem in no way different from the ball chaperones of the last century. Every other minute they adjust their daughters' hair-dress or pieces of jewellery; here is a straying tress, and here a necklace is out of place. No one else would notice these faults, and the way they worry continually over the looks of the dancers is rather laughable, and yet rather touching.

You might well imagine that the youths of the village would be here, forming an enthusiastic audience round the dance-platform; but you would be wrong. The boys are far too busy with their own dressing. They are sitting in front of the men's house combing out each other's long hair

and arranging the white hornbill feathers in the bushy crests of red goat's hair on their hats. This morning they have searched the forest for the choicest of ear ornaments—gold and violet orchids—only the most beautiful are fitting for the Spring Festival.

But all this trouble is not in vain, for the hearts of the girls beat faster as the men, whirling their spears and daos as though setting out on the war-path, rush through the village with wild cries. With their tossing feathers, and the gaily dyed goat's hair waving from the weapons and head-dress, they look like fantastic birds, and, like birds in the mating season, they rejoice in the glory of their brilliant spring dress, that reduces the weaker sex to comparative insignificance.

Singing and dancing, the crowd of men leave the morung at the farthest end of the village and pass along the narrow streets till they reach the chief's house, and soon the open place is thronged with singing crowds; daos flash high in the air, voices are raised, and the song swells forth, breaking at the climax into harsh, uncanny yells.

Suddenly all is quiet. The individual groups break up, the girls stop their dance, and the men and the boys form a great circle. And now there is a space with an old man in the middle; by descent and office he is the intermediary between man and the immortals. He is taking a handful of cooked rice—now he throws it towards the sky, and his solemn voice sounds through the breathless stillness:—

‘Oh, Gawang, Lord of the sky! Give that our fields may be fruitful; give us rice in plenty; give us millet in plenty; give us taro in plenty. The people of the village, let them be strong. Our children, let them be strong.’

After each phrase the crowd of men raise their daos to the sky and shout in unison, ‘So let it be!’ The hearts of the whole assembly tremble with awe before the deity, for in his hand lie happiness and misfortune, good and bad harvests. However bold and self-willed they may be, they know only too well that their efforts alone do not safeguard the growth and ripening of the crops, so they sacrifice to Gawang, god of the sky, who grants fertility to the fields and children to men. They trust in him alone, and trouble little over the

lesser spirits, who have no power over the sun and the rain.

Dark clouds have gathered over the mountains; and as though the god deigns to answer, lightning rends the sky and thunder rolls in the distance. Heavy drops begin to fall, and the people have hardly time to run for the shelter of the chief's protecting roof before the rain pours from the sky. A spring storm in all its sudden might breaks over the hills, and the thirsty earth drinks greedily of the welcome rain.

No sooner has the rain passed over than the old men group themselves round a bamboo pole. It has been erected to the god of the sky, and for about half an hour they murmur secret formulae, while the young men dance round, swinging their daos and shouting loud songs, lest any woman or any of the younger people should hear the words of the elders. Almost half an hour these secret prayers last, and the whole time howling crowds race round the pole.

It was months before I could induce a man to confide the secret of this rite. Its theme is also the fertility of the fields, and it runs: 'As a woman embraces her lover, so may the earth take the seed of the rice into her womb'. The fertility of field and man are closely linked in the mind of the Naga: they are different expressions of the same force, and the prosperity of the village depends on its abundance.

The solemn ritual of the feast is now over, and the girls entertain the boys in the chief's house. For days they have pounded rice and brewed beer, pigs have been killed, and the food is steaming in the huge pots on the hearth. Afterwards the dance is continued in the large hall, the girls and the boys dancing separately. It is almost dark, and the gleam of the flickering fire picks here and there on glistening naked backs or blades of swinging daos. Gradually the dancing throng thins; the youngest boys and girls dance on, but the older ones slip away and celebrate the birth of Spring in their own way.

I go out into the night, glad of the cool air after the stuffiness of the crowded chief's house. A full moon sails in the cloudless sky. Light and shade alternate in a fantastic mosaic; the silvered, palm-thatched roofs gleam like glitter-

ing stones. From time to time belated groups of revellers sing and dance through the village, where only a few sleep that night. But for such outbursts, stillness reigns over the village, and only from the chief's house can you still hear the occasional verse of some indefatigable singer.

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As I open my eyes after a short sleep, I can see the girls through the slits of my bamboo hut still dancing in the light of the breaking dawn. Only when the sun emerges in all his red glory from behind the mountains does their song cease.

Piece by piece the girls divest themselves of their ornaments, and bid a reluctant farewell to the time of leisure and feasting. To-day is still a day of rest, but to-morrow the work on the fields must begin again; for the new year starts the eternal round of sowing, weeding, and harvest, and for long months to come every day will see the people busy in their fields tending the rice.

24

THE WORLD BEYOND

RICE is already sprouting in the fields, and each day the Wakching people look anxiously at the deep blue sky, where a merciless sun burns down on the young crops. Although it is May, the heavy rains of summer have not yet started this year, and only now and then a short thunder-storm breaks the long drought. Once more I am on tour and camping in Wanching, and the sky is still cloudless and starry. Mist lies only on the distant mountains, and a half-moon rises from the veil wreathing the peaks, dark yellow like old gold. She does not climb the path of the heavens upright, but sails out into the sky like a rocking ship, her curved keel to the earth; on the horizon threatening lightning blinks spasmodically, miraculously outlining the rim of the sky where it touches the earth.

Hardly have I gone to sleep than there is a terrible clap of thunder and I am awake again. The calm of the evening has given way to a frightening turmoil. Violent squalls throw themselves on my tent, and soon the rain pelts down on the canvas roof; my small tent window is lit by almost incessant flashes of lightning, and rolls of thunder drown the howling of wind in the trees. I try to persuade myself that the storm will soon pass, but instead of passing, its fury only grows with every minute. My tent trembles and sways; still lying in bed, I grasp one of the two posts and try to counteract the worst blows. The ditch dug round the tent no longer traps the water; it is full to overflowing, and the whole floor of the tent is soon flooded.

Suddenly there is a frightful crash as of splintering wood. If only the huge tree spreading its branches over my tent stands firm! From the noise on all sides it sounds as though all the trees in the neighbourhood are breaking up. Just as I jump from my bed, Nlamo rushes in, shouting that I should seek refuge in the morung. Quickly I collect my

precious camera and some of my notebooks, and run through the rain and torrents of water streaming over the hillside towards the morung. There I find Yongem and several Wanching boys disturbed from sleep. Suddenly I remember that the carrying-basket, with my diaries, probably stands open in my tent. So I run once more through the downpour, slipping continually with my bare soles on the slimy clay and struggling against the masses of water rushing downhill. The tent still stands; I manage to throw all my most valuable things into waterproof baskets and tie them up firmly. Now nothing very serious can happen.

Returning to the morung, we sit wet and shivering round a small fire. My boys are worse off than I, for their small hut has been blown down by the storm, and all their things are scattered. They complain too that all the provisions are swimming about in the water. That does not sound very hopeful for a hot breakfast.

By morning the storm abates, and, to my surprise, we find my tent has resisted its force. But the whole village presents a scene of destruction. Roofs have been blown away, and large trees broken or uprooted. I would never have thought that such giants of trees could break under a storm like matches. On the path to Wakching a whole patch of forest has been battered down; most of the field-houses are destroyed and the fragments dispersed untidily over the ground.

Just as they did some weeks ago after a small earthquake, the whole village holds a holiday, to avert further misfortune. For whenever anything unusual or disastrous occurs, a day of abstention from work is supposed to re-establish the disturbed balance and protect the community from all latent danger.

What, you are tempted to ask, is the Konyak's idea of the natural phenomena that sometimes threaten his life and his property? Is he that 'primitive man' who lives in constant and vague fear of unknown and hostile forces, so often depicted by some philosophers? He certainly is not. His conception of the world is clear and simple, and his ideas on Nature are mainly the result of logical deduc-

tion. Ideas and conclusions may be wrong—the conception of the world as held by the ancients was partly wrong too—but this does not mean that the Konyak's approach to Nature is fundamentally different from that of the European peasant in the Middle Ages.

Mysticism and ponderous thoughts do not appeal to the Konyak. When lightning flashes over the sky and thunder resounds behind the mountains, he knows they are produced by Gawang, the lord of the sky. How this happens, he cares little, but whoever digs near a tree struck by lightning finds one of Gawang's thunderbolts—is this not proof enough? For much money I have acquired some of these magic stones, but there would be little point in trying to explain to my friends that they are the polished stone celts of their own ancestors.

Gawang is thought of as a definitely personal being, but no Konyak can say exactly how he looks. 'Like a tall Naga man with spear and dao,' some men suppose, but so that my feelings shall not be hurt, they admit that he might look like a Sahib. 'But who can tell?'

Yet they all agree that he lives somewhere in the sky and that long ago he made the firmament:—

'Gawang made also the earth and man,' Chinyang remarks one day, 'but how he made man, that we do not know. But we say that we are his children. When we become rich or poor, it comes from Gawang; when we have plenty to eat, it comes from Gawang; when we have fever, it too comes from Gawang.'

'But tell me, does Gawang live quite alone in the sky? Has he no wife and no children?'

'We do not know anything of a wife of Gawang', explains Yongang with a smile, 'and his children, these are we ourselves!'

The Konyaks are firmly convinced that Gawang can see and hear everything. If a man exaggerates or boasts too much, someone may say: 'Don't tell such lies, Gawang hears, and will tear your mouth'. Generally, such a threat is meant only in jest, but in cases of serious crime Gawang's punishments are called down on the head of the offender.

It is in keeping with the Konyaks' realistic philosophy of life that Gawang does not wait to judge earthly offenders till after death, but his rewards and punishments are mainly for this, and not for the next world. He gives no male heir to a man who pursues adventures with 'women living in their husbands' houses', and whosoever steals from his neighbour or incites quarrels in the village is punished by an untimely death.

Gawang even watches over the numerous taboos and sees that they are observed. When once I ask Dzeamang, a young man of Ang clan, whether during the meals in the field-houses he too may eat from the same dish as the girls of Ben clan, he answers quite spontaneously: 'Of course, I should like to eat with them, but Gawang sees it'. Therefore he does not dare to eat with commoners.

It is not only during feasts and ceremonies that the Konyak invokes Gawang; often in the course of his daily life he will murmur a prayer to the sky-god. When he begins to eat, he will throw a bit of rice or taro to one side saying: 'Gawang, eat you first'. When he is lucky out hunting, he cuts off a small piece of flesh and throws it into the forest for Gawang with the words: 'In the future, give me again such luck'.

Compared with Gawang, the spirits of the earth, the wood, and the rivers are not very important. They may be malignant towards man, and they must therefore be placated during illness with offerings of chickens and pigs, but it is only Gawang who holds the power of life in his hands, and it is only Gawang's wrath that can send a man to his death.

Sometimes ordinary mortals see the spirits of the wood or the water as they slip by, but only particularly endowed men can see Gawang in their dreams. There are not many of these favoured of the earth, and I know of only three in the country round Wakching: Lemang of Kongan, Shopong of Tanhai, and the Wakching woman, Limnia. They are not only seers and prophets, but were-tigers, for at night they roam the country in the shape of tigers.

Among the Nagas this is a frequent phenomenon, and



38. Lemang, the famous were-tiger of Kongan

Shopong himself tells me how his soul leaves his sleeping body and enters the body of a tiger; how he joins the other tigers at night in some far-distant place; and how at any hour of the day he knows exactly the whereabouts of his tiger. Lemang pretends his tiger is no ordinary tiger, for he says he does not kill man; in his youth he hunted animals, but now he has grown too old, and so the other tigers bring him food in the evening, but he never shows himself to men, for he is afraid of being shot.

There are many people who have seen and can tell of Lemang's adventures in the shape of a tiger. One night two Aos in Government service were frightened by a tiger moving noiselessly through the jungle near Namsang, but they missed when they fired, and the tiger immediately disappeared. Arriving at Kongan next day, Lemang greeted them at the village gate with the question:—

‘Why did you shoot at me last night? You only missed me by a hair's breadth! ’

According to Konyak belief, the death of the tiger would have caused Lemang himself to die within a few days; if one of these animals is even wounded, a similar wound is believed to appear on the corresponding spot on the man's body. Mills told me of many were-tigers among the Aos who actually did die suddenly a few days after their tigers had been killed.

That Lemang possessed at least second sight was proved by an event that occurred while I was in Wakching. Thirty silver rupees, a laya, and an embroidered apron were stolen from the house of Apong, the dobashi of Wanching. All investigations proved vain, and so at last he went to Kongan to consult Lemang, who told him he knew of the thief. In the shape of a tiger, roaming about in the valley of the Dikhu, he had seen two Yungya boys coming from the direction of Wanching. They had wrapped up a stone in an apron and thrown it into the Dikhu with the words: ‘As this apron shall never again come to the surface, so shall our deed remain for ever hidden’. Apong had only to go to Yungya and ask the boys whether they had seen a tiger by the Dikhu.

And then Apong remembered that there had been three Yungya people in Wanching the day of the theft, and he set out at once for their village. There he met the boys, and confronted them with Lemang's accusation. Completely shattered by such supernatural knowledge, they confessed to the crime and all its details. They had actually seen a tiger by the Dikhu that day.

However, there are sceptics even among the Nagas, and one of the gaonburas of Namsang-Sumniching, when I spoke of Lemang and other seers, only remarked depreciatingly:—

‘How is it that a man can sleep here and his soul can wander about? That is a swindle. These seers see nothing more in their dreams than other people, but of course it is pleasant to pocket rupees. Lemang earns two rupees here, and three rupees there; naturally he likes to tell the people all sorts of lies.’

When I asked whether the seers really wander about as tigers at night, he got even more excited:—

‘How can a man become a tiger? Man is of man's clan, tiger of tiger's clan, and pig of pig's clan. Can a pig change itself into a man? No; then how shall a man change himself into a tiger? That is all lies! ’

Once, he says, a woman soothsayer warned him to beware of her tiger roaming near the village, and so he had taken his gun and gone to look for the beast; not so much as a track did he see in the jungle.

A few months before I am to leave Wakching, I decide to employ the services of the soothsayer Limnia to learn more of the nature of her prophecies. So that she shall not be upset by an unaccustomed task, I take Shankok with me to help formulate the questions. He tells me I should take, as is the custom, a little rice for Limnia, and on entering the house, I must scatter a few grains, unnoticed, on the floor.

Towards evening we climb down through the labyrinth of narrow streets to Limnia's house. She lives with her second husband and five children, the youngest scarcely a year old, and seems just like any other middle-aged Wakching

woman. Shankok tells her that I have heard of her fame, and now I have come to her because I want her to prophesy for me. I want to know if fate will grant me a safe and peaceful return journey to my own country, if all my relations are living and in good health, and lastly—which to Shankok is the most important of all—whether I shall soon find a wife. Limnia listens calmly and without saying much; she only remarks that she will have great difficulty in reaching in her dream a land so far distant as mine.

I ask her about her experiences in her dream-life, and she answers me with clear and short sentences; her manner of speaking is more self-assured than that of other women. No mystic veil envelops this seer, and nothing suggests insanity; her description of the next world coincides for the most part with the traditional conceptions of the Konyaks, except that she enters the land of the dead in her dreams, and herself speaks to the dead. If a man has reason to believe that a lately deceased relation is angry, he asks Limnia to find out the reason and to discover a way to propitiate the dead.

Before Limnia falls into her trance she strews rice on the floor and speaks to Gawang:—

‘Gawang, grant I see all beings, that I know clearly all things, that I see you in my dream. Give me good dreams.’

Then she falls into a deep sleep and her soul goes to Yimbu, the land of the dead. If she meets a man yet living, on the way, then she knows he will soon die; however, she can save his life by an offering to Gawang—that is if the family of the threatened man are prepared to give her a cloth, a dao, and a spear, and to sacrifice a pig, which Limnia kills saying:—

‘Gawang, give that this man remains alive, that he will become old, that his hair becomes white.’

The following night Limnia goes to the land of the dead, to bring back the soul of the man.

Presumably Limnia is clever enough not to try to persuade men in good health that their souls are already on the way to Yimbu, but looks for ready believers among

those that are ill and in the grip of high fever, whose consciousness is already dimmed.

Small children who die not yet able to walk lie crying on the path to Yimbu until Limnia carries them to the land of the dead and hands them over to those of their relations already there; for this service too she receives payment from the parents of the children.

The life in Yimbu resembles the life on this earth; the dead work on their fields, celebrate the spring festival, marry, have children, and eventually die once more. Then they go to another Yimbu, where Limnia cannot follow. Good and bad alike live in one village, but those who die an unnatural death arrive in the village of the dead by quite another path.

Often I am surprised by the equanimity with which the Konyak views his own entrance into the land of the dead. As Chinyang put on his head-dress with buffalo horns and human hair at the Spring Festival, he told me quite calmly that this ornament would eventually adorn his death-monument:—

‘ I would not give it up for any price, for when I die it shall hang on my death monument, so that all shall say “ That is the death-monument of Chinyang, who himself captured heads ”. And in Yimbu I need all my ornaments and all my weapons, for the men I have slain in this life wait for me on the way to Yimbu, and I must fight them all once more.’

He said all this in a casual tone, as though he talked of the work on the fields, or of a feast shortly to be celebrated. The Konyaks only speak with sorrow, or sentimentality, of their relatives’, and never of their own death. They consider it unavoidable, and do not fear it in the same way as other peoples.

Limnia promises to dream for me to-night, but now she says we should leave her alone; to-morrow morning she will answer my questions.

Early next morning Shankok arrives, and tells me with great excitement all he has heard from the neighbours; that Limnia has had a bad night, and is now quite exhausted

from the efforts of the long journey to my land. For this reason, we do not go to her house until late in the day; even then she still lies on her bed. A neighbour tells us that soon after our departure Limnia fell into a trance and behaved in such a frightening way that her husband called him to stand by. They had stayed up till the first cock-crow, for they had really been afraid that she might die.

While we are talking, Limnia gets up; she is indeed a picture of misery, and complains of a violent headache and pains in the legs from the long journey. Then she begins her tale, rather haltingly in a low voice.

In the shape of her tiger, she searched for the path to my land, and roamed about in the jungle for a long time before finding the right way. Then she ran and ran, a very, very long way through a large plain, and when at last she arrived in my village, it was so late that all people were in their houses, and she had to remain outside my house, without seeing my family. But she knows that all my relations are alive and in the best of health. I shall come back to my country without meeting any danger, and I will not encounter any enemies on my path. I shall have plenty to eat and enough money. Soon I will find a wife. She sees my wife quite clearly: she is white as I, and beautiful to look at—neither very tall nor very small, but of middle height.

Shankok is highly satisfied with the session, and I pay for Limnia's trouble with a few rupees. I do not doubt her good faith, but I realize that a careful and intentional swindler could have given the same answers to my questions.

* * * * *

However this may be, Limnia's prophecies have all come true—only as to the money the tiger must have made a slip.

25

FAREWELL

THE veranda of my bungalow is covered with the specimens of my collection: spears and daos from Wakching, Longkhai, Chingmei, and various villages beyond the frontier; valuable bronze gongs; cloths of different colours; red plaited hats with buffalo horns; ornaments for men and women; baskets; wooden dishes and agricultural implements; a long row of carvings, and hundreds of other things, many of which I have acquired only after long negotiation and at a high price.

I cannot help my eyes falling also on those objects which I feel now I would rather never have possessed—a small log-drum, a pair of grave-statues, and the model of a chief's coffin—for their making has brought much sorrow to their creators.

It was in the first month of my stay in Wakching that I told the gaonburas of my wish to purchase a small log-drum. They advised me to talk to Chinkak, the Ang of Wakching—he, said the gaonburas, was a good wood-carver, and since he did no work he had plenty of time to carve me whatever I wanted. Chinkak, though nominally Ang of Wakching, has not achieved much in this life, and is one of the few Nagas I would describe as a social misfit. His father, of the powerful Ang family of Chi, had been offered the chieftainship of Wakching, at a time when the peace of the village had been disturbed by internal quarrels. However, his strict autocratic rule had not been to the liking of the Wakching people, and when he died, leaving no heir of pure Ang blood, they were careful not to repeat the experiment with a 'Great Ang', preferring rather to recognize Chinkak, the son of a concubine. But Chinkak never succeeded in gaining any influence, and, an addict of opium, he soon wasted the rich heritage of his father. He still receives tribute from the vassal villages of Wakching,

but more often than not he mortgages it long before it falls due.

Chinkak was therefore only too pleased to raise some extra cash by carving me a log-drum. Yet he had his doubts about the task; to carve a drum, otherwise made and dragged into the village with numerous ceremonies, was not so harmless as it appeared, for just then his wife was pregnant, and he feared the child might be harmed if he carved that drum. I considered this only a pretext for raising the price, and my willingness to pay a larger and a comparatively high price for the drum eventually conquered Chinkak's doubts.

He carved the drum, and I paid the price. A few months later his child was born—with a hare lip.

‘Of course,’ said the Wakching people, ‘the slit in the drum and the slit in the child’s lip are one and the same; Chinkak should not have carved that drum while his wife was pregnant.’

The two grave-figures, dressed and armed like real warriors with small spears and daos, are, like so many of the other carvings of my collection, the work of my friend Mauwang, the Ang of Longkhai. He, too, had hesitated for a long time before promising to carve them.

‘When an Ang dies, we carve grave figures,’ he argued. ‘If I now carve such figures for you, might it not happen that someone will die?’

But at last I persuaded him, and so he sacrificed a pig before starting, as though he were working for a real funeral. Hardly were the figures completed, than Mauwang fell ill, and though he sacrificed many chickens, he did not recover. Returning from the Pangsha tour, I found him in the deplorable condition of neglected malaria. Atebrin soon put him on his feet again, but instead of reproaching me for exposing him to the danger of illness by asking for the two figures, he thanked me again and again for the miraculous cure.

These two experiences should have put me wise, and warned me against persuading a man to carve objects linked with magical dangers. But my collection lacked a

model of a coffin, and Chinkak, once more in need of money for opium, offered to carve me one. Angs' coffins are laid out on platforms like those of ordinary men, but they are carved at both ends with hornbill heads. Soon after Chinkak had brought me the finished coffin, and received his reward, his five-year-old daughter fell ill, and died within a few days. Now it was necessary to make a child's coffin similar to the model Chinkak had carved for me, and there was not a soul in Wakching who doubted the fateful connection between the making of the model coffin and the child's sudden death.

Never again in my life shall I frivolously order a coffin.

* * * * *

Coolies from three villages have gathered to carry my luggage and the objects of my collection down to Borjan, for it is only there that I shall be able to pack them into boxes. All the gaonburas are here to distribute the loads and to say good-bye; Mauwang, too, has come with his brothers from Longkhai and Ahom from Shiong. They all have only one question:—

‘When will you come back, Sahib?’

For the last time I look over the valleys and mountains I have seen so often in the morning mist and the gold of the setting sun, and I, too, ask myself: when shall I come back?

No way has ever seemed so hard as that way down the hill past Wakching, past the rest-house, where we have sat so often, and past the little path to the fields, where now a few girls wait and smile at me as I pass.

‘Good-bye, Chinyang; keep well and thank you for everything. Yes, I too should like to stay longer with you—and you too, Yongang; may Gawang give you a good harvest. Metlou—Dzeamang—good-bye to you all. Let’s hope we may soon meet again.’

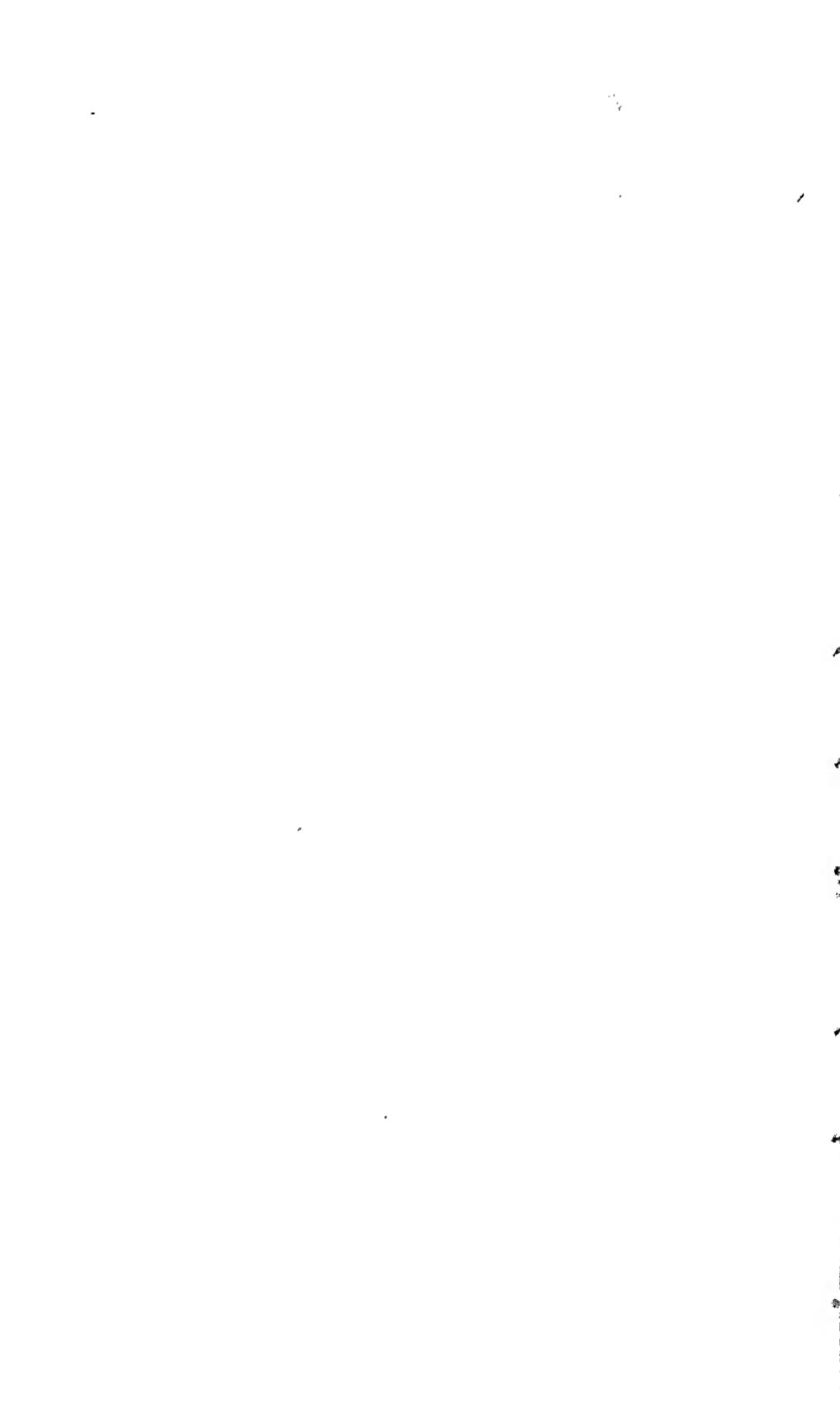
Shankok goes with me through the high forest where so often we shot green pigeons. We both have only one thought: Good-bye for a long time, perhaps for ever. To talk of something, we talk of Shankok’s fields and the chances of a good harvest now that the spring is past;

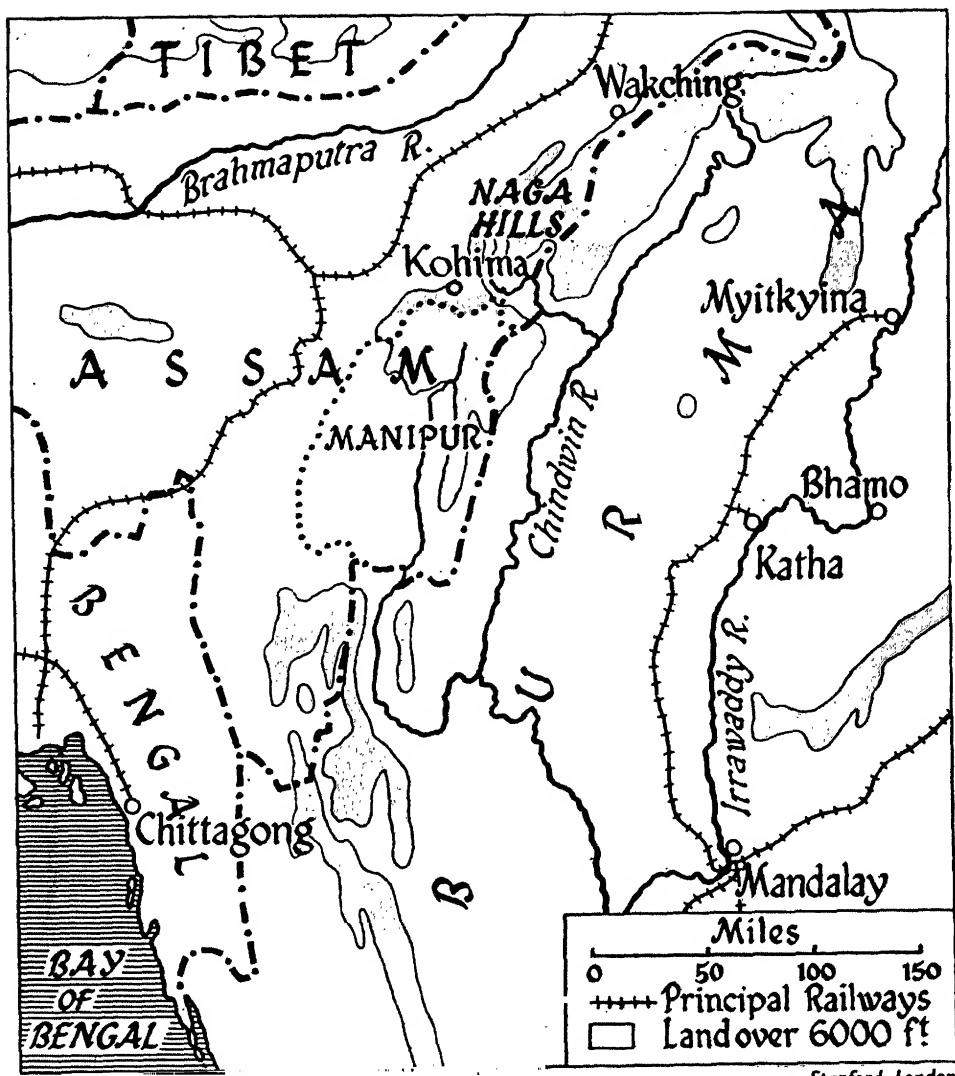
once more we count how many fields he possesses; it is about two hundred and fifty—anything to avoid remembering all those evenings we have spent together, all the friendly talks and all the fun we have had together. Such a happy time it has been. Does Shankok know that I have never spent a happier?

But now it must be:—

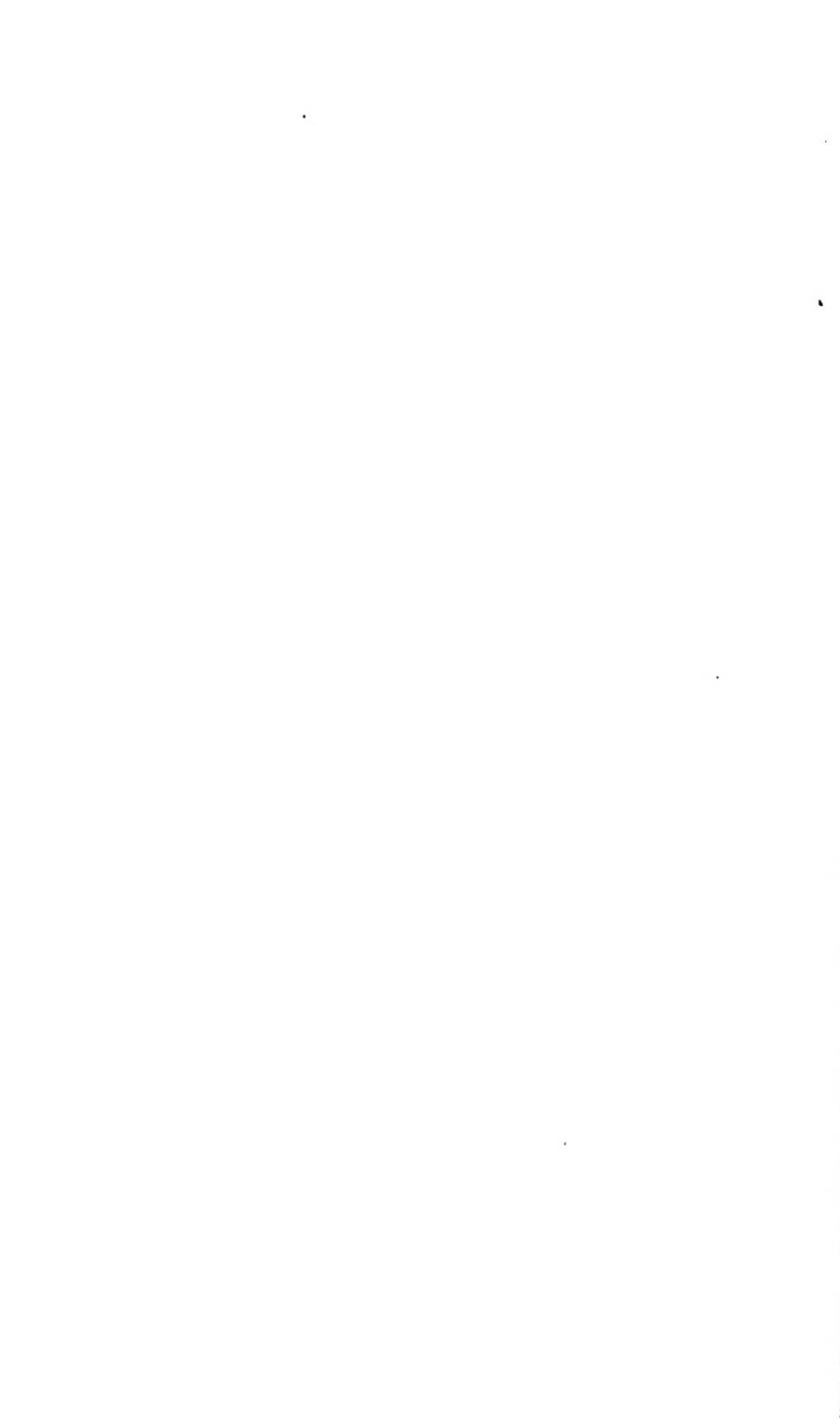
‘Thank you, Shankok. I know it is hard. But I will come again—certainly I shall come again.’

Neither of us can speak. I hold his hand; tears trickle down his cheeks. He turns round. Only when I have gone a short way does he turn back and wave to me. Quite small he stands there on the slope, a brown spot against the green of the jungle. The sun is setting, and deep below me the golden ribbon of the Brahmaputra winds through the immense plains of Assam.





Map of the Assam-Burma Frontier showing the location of the Naga Hills



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